
Inuit
Yup'ik
Haida
Kwakwaka'wakw
Cheyenne
Paiute
Navaho
Cahuilla
Zuni
Huichol
Aztecs
Maya
Yanomamo
Pirahã
Jivaro


Tungus
Yakut
Tuva
Okinawa
Egyptians
Hofriyat
Hmong
Ifugao
Yoruba
Nuer
Bengi
Azande
Fon
Bunyoro
Kongo
Tana Toraja
Dani
Asmat
Fore
Trobriand Islands
Bushongo
Mumgin
San
Swazi
Maori
0 1500 3000 Miles
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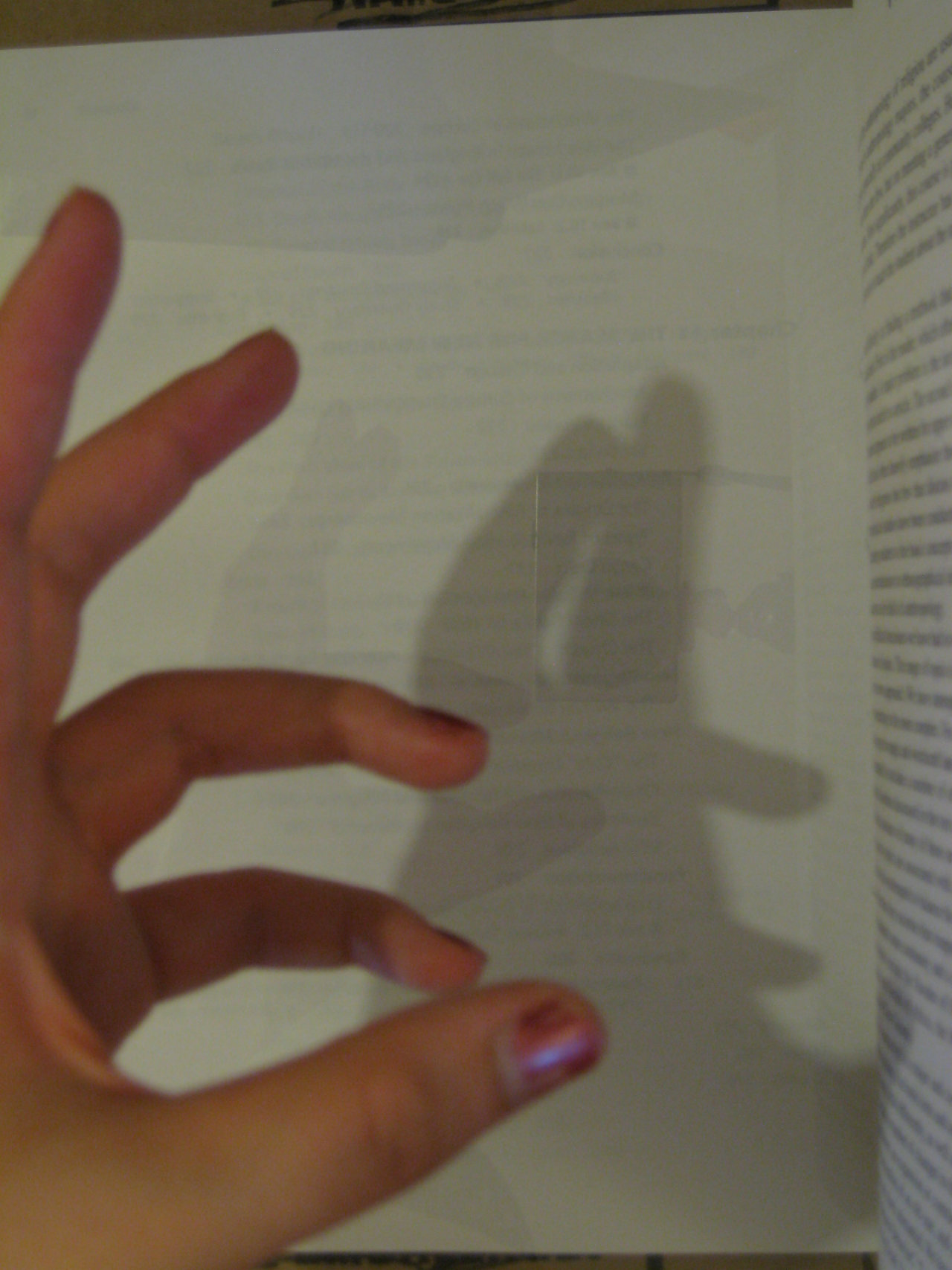
CONTENTS



PREFACE

CHAPTER

1

The Anthropological Study of Religion

The medical team that was sent in to deal with the disease sought the cause. Because it appeared to be largely confined to the Fore, the team thought it might be genetic or due to a toxin in the environment. However, *kuru* was finally determined to be the result of an infectious agent called a prion. The major question was how the *kuru* prion was passed from one person to another. Was it passed on through contaminated water, through the air, or through sexual activity? The answer to the puzzle was proposed by anthropologists: cannibalism.

It was the custom of the Fore to eat the body as part of the funeral rituals—one aspect of their religious practices. The body of the deceased was carried down to an abandoned field, where kin dismembered and cooked it. Close relatives then consumed the pieces. Because cooking does not destroy the prions, some of them entered the bloodstream through

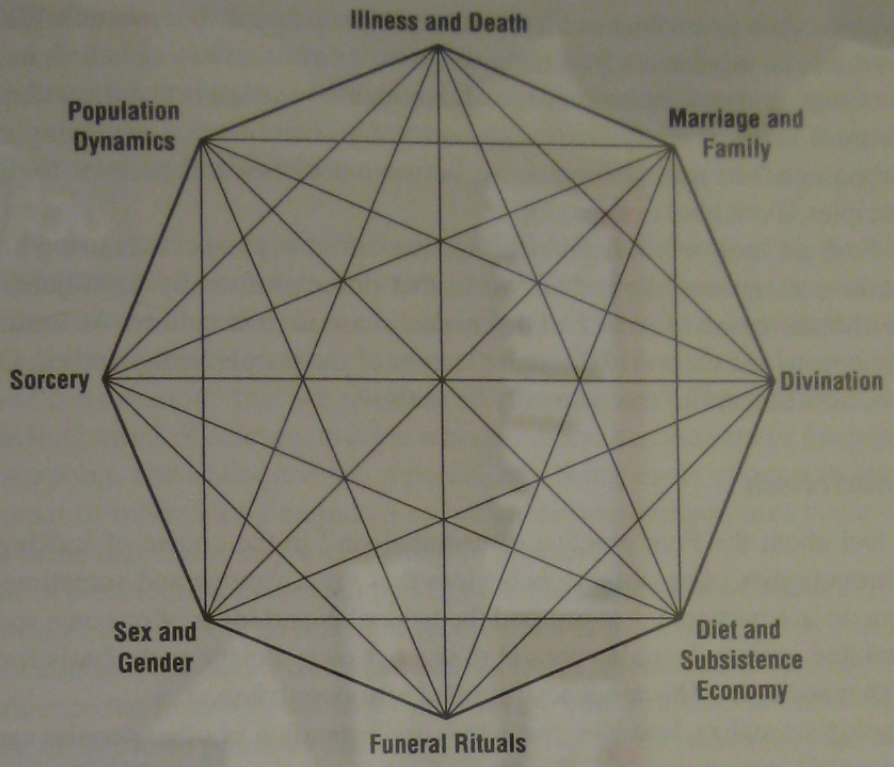


FIGURE 1.1 ***Holism.*** A complete understanding of the disease *kuru* among the Fore of New Guinea requires an understanding of the relationship of *kuru* to other aspects of Fore culture, some of which are shown in this diagram.

Two Ways of Viewing Culture

We can ask the question: What causes *kuru* among the Fore? From our viewpoint a complete answer to that question includes both biological factors (the disease-causing organism) and cultural factors (the practice of cannibalism). However, the Fore themselves would give another answer to this question: *Kuru* is caused by sorcery. Another aspect to the holistic approach is to consider both insider and outsider perspectives.

An anthropologist—or any scholar, for that matter—cannot be completely neutral and objective when describing a culture. Observation, recording, and analysis involve processing data in one's mind. One's own cultural background, education, training, and other factors will act as a filter or lens that colors what are thought of as objective observations. Physicians, using a medical model, searched for the cause of *kuru* through techniques learned in medical school that are based on a set of postulates developed through the scientific method. Although the physicians were able to discover the biological cause of *kuru*, the disease-causing protein, they were unable to discover the mode of transmission. Medical science identifies a series of transmission pathways, and none of them offered a valid explanation. It took anthropologists, viewing the situation from a holistic, anthropological viewpoint, to make the connection between *kuru* and cannibalism, although this had to be confirmed through a set of procedures mandated by the scientific method.

The physician and the anthropologist are outsiders looking in. They see Fore culture in terms of Western philosophy and theory. They speak of the Fore using words that categorize experience in a particular way. This is referred to as an **etic perspective**. There are advantages to

an etic perspective. Just as a friend or therapist might see patterns to a person's life that the person might overlook, an outside analyst might see patterns of behaviors or beliefs in a culture that the members of that group might be unaware of. Another advantage is that the anthropologist can apply a consistent form of analysis to many different societies that are being studied. This permits anthropologists to make comparisons between societies and perhaps to discover some universal principles about human behavior.

Yet the Fore see their world from an altogether different perspective, using linguistic categories and basic assumptions about their world that differ profoundly from ours. To the Fore, sorcery is the ultimate cause of *kuru*, and this makes sense in their culture. An **emic perspective** is one that attempts to see the world through the eyes of the people being studied. Of course, the big question is, how successful can we really be at this?

Cultural Relativism

How do you feel about the Fore practice of cannibalism? In the course of looking at different societies, anthropologists often observe behaviors that seem strange and sometimes disturbing. We have grown up in a particular society, and the behaviors and ideas of our own society seem to us to be natural and correct. It is also natural to use our own society as the basis for interpreting and judging other societies. This tendency is called **ethnocentrism**.

Anthropologists realize, however, that a true understanding of other peoples cannot develop through ethnocentric interpretations. Thinking of other people as primitive, superstitious, and immoral only colors our observations and prevents us from reaching any kind of true understanding about human behavior and thought. Anthropologists attempt to remain neutral and to accept the ways of life of other communities as appropriate for those who live in these communities. Anthropologists attempt to describe and understand people's customs and ideas but do not judge them. This approach is known as **cultural relativism**. The goal is to study what people believe, not whether or not what they believe is true.

For example, funeral rituals differ from other rituals in one major respect: There is a dead body. All societies have ways of disposing of the corpse in one way or another. Burial is quite common, but there are a number of variables such as where the grave is located, what the body is buried in, what objects are buried with the body, and so on. Bodies can also be placed in trees to decay, and later the bones may be cleaned and buried. Bodies can be cremated, and the remains kept in a container, buried, or scattered at sea. Among the Yanomamö of Venezuela and Brazil, the cremated remains are ground into a powder. At various times after a person's death, the family gathers together and prepares a banana stew into which some of the cremated ashes are mixed. Then they drink the mixture. And, of course, as we saw with the Fore, there is the custom of eating the body.

The practice of drinking cremated remains or eating human flesh would probably horrify most North Americans, and its practice in U.S. society would probably lead to some type of reaction on the part of the society—most likely psychiatric confinement. On the other hand, the Yanomamö are horrified by the U.S. practice of burial because it leads to the decay of the body in the ground. They believe that the finest expression of love is for close relatives to provide a final resting place for their loved ones within their own bodies. Is this practice wrong, immoral, or dangerous? The answer to this question, of course, lies within the cultural practices of the group and how that group defines correct and appropriate behaviors.

POSTMODERNISM. We may wonder if it is at all possible for someone from one society to truly get to know and understand people living in another society. Beginning with the

Despite this questioning, cultural relativism remains of utmost importance to anthropologists. Our first approach should always be to try to understand a culture's beliefs and behaviors in context, to learn what meaning the world has through their eyes.

The Concept of Culture

In the previous examples of the Aztec and the Fore, we observed a number of specific behaviors and beliefs. For example, an anthropologist living among the Fore for a period of time would, of course, record descriptions of Fore life in much more detail and cover many other aspects of their lives—marriage and family, child rearing, hunting and farming, trade, technology, political organization, folklore, and so on. It is obvious that the body of behaviors and beliefs of the Fore are quite different from ours. These behaviors and beliefs make up Fore **culture**.

In anthropology the term *culture* is used as a technical term. It does not refer to the arts or the "finer things of life." Although the term is widely used and discussed, finding a definition that is acceptable to all anthropologists is a difficult task.

The British anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1832–1917) first used the term *culture* in its anthropological sense. In 1871, Tylor wrote, "Culture...is that complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."[4] In this definition Tyl

A true understanding of the breadth of religious practices among the world's societies will become clear as you progress through this text. We encourage you to keep an open mind and settle on your own definition as you gain more knowledge and understanding. However, as was discussed previously, as an endeavor in the social sciences, this text needs an operant definition in order to proceed.

[redacted] a simple definition of the term *religion*. However, the search for a

"false," or "full of superstitions." Clearly, this leads us into highly ethnocentric conclusions that

and to promote social cooperation. Collective representations, or symbols, are a reflection of the collective conscious. During rituals, these collective representations are displayed, resulting in a reattachment to the value system of the group.

Both Durkheim and Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown saw society as being like an organism in which the parts act to maintain the whole.[15] Radcliffe-Brown also thought that for society to survive, certain feelings need to be encouraged in people's minds. He thought that anything of great social value is seen as possessing supernatural power; the greater the value, the more powerful it is. Rituals, then, function to express the basic sentiments of a society and to pass these ideas down from generation to generation. Religion, in general, is seen as an integrative force in society.

Radcliffe-Brown's approach to function was in terms of a part contributing to the maintenance of the whole society. Another important theorist in the functional school, Bronislaw Malinowski, had a different approach (Box 1.2). Malinowski looked at religion and other

BOX 1.2

Malinowski and the Trobriand Islands

Bronislaw Malinowski was born into the nobility in Krakow, Poland, in 1884. He studied mathe-

THE PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH. The **psychosocial approach** to the study of religion is concerned with the relationship between culture and personality and the connection between the society and the individual. One example is the work of Sigmund Freud.[18] Freud's model of the mind and his concept of defense mechanisms have been used both by Freud himself and by his followers to explain religious phenomena. For example, defense mechanisms are psychological maneuvers by which we distort reality in ways that help us to avoid conflict and reduce anxiety. The most important of these for our discussion is projection, in which the subject is transposed and the emotion is projected. So "I hate X" becomes "You hate X." Psychosocial anthropologists believe that individual emotions also get projected at the cultural level.

The best example of this is studies that look cross-culturally for correlations between various beliefs and behaviors. One example of this approach uses this methodology to hypothesize a connection between the characteristics of parents and the characteristics of supernatural beings. Childhood experiences are dominated by powerful figures—parents. Children build up parental images that stay with them throughout life. In adult life these parental images are projected onto spirit beings. For example, if parents are generally nurturing, the expectation is that the gods would be considered to be nurturing as well. However, correlation does not equal causation, and this and several other issues challenge the correlational approach.

The Biological Basis of Religious Behavior

What we perceive and think of as our reality is actually a creation of our brain. Our awareness of what is "out there" is based upon input from a series of receptors such as our eyes, nose, and tongue. The stimuli that are picked up by these receptors enter the brain, where they undergo processing before they enter our consciousness. For example, the clear, detailed, three-dimensional, colored world revealed through sight is an illusion created by our brain from a hodgepodge of electrical impulses created by the photoreceptors in the retina of our eyes. Color is a complete illusion of something that does not exist in the real world, but is our brain's way of representing differences in the wavelength of electromagnetic energy.

And not all of the information that enters our brain from the outside enters our consciousness. For example, there was a patient who was blind because of a series of strokes that completely destroyed the visual cortex of his brain; his eyes and optic nerves, however, remained healthy. Information entering the brain from his eyes was used by his brain to permit him to walk down a hallway full of objects on the floor without stepping on them. His brain knew where the objects were even though his consciousness did not.[19]

This then brings up the question: Does our brain create realities that are indistinguishable from "reality," whatever that means? An important part of religion is religious experiences, which range from feeling good to hallucinations and revelations. Could, for example, seeing a ghost, having an out-of-body experience, or being visited by an angel be examples of brain-created realities? The answer is yes.

Figure 1.2 shows a pair of brain scans that compare brains at rest with brains of individuals in deep meditation. The bright areas are regions that are active during particular mental activities. In the meditating brain, we see an increase in activity in the frontal lobe, indicative of increased concentration, and a decrease in activity in the parietal lobe. This latter area is in the region associated with people's orientation of their bodies in time and space. Changes in activity in this area may be related to the development of out-of-body experiences or to a sense of blurring of the boundaries between self and other. In another interesting area of research, it has been found that patients suffering from temporal lobe epilepsy, when the functioning of the brain goes haywire, report their seizures as intense religious experiences.

It is tempting to associate religious feelings and experiences with a particular point within the structure of the brain—a God module perhaps. However, most neuroscientists who are interested in these issues see religious experiences as more complex, involving changes in many different regions of the brain.

Considering biological influences is a part of anthropology's holistic approach. It is something we will consider as we discuss phenomena such as altered states of consciousness and near-death experiences.

BELIEFS IN SPIRIT BEINGS. Another aspect of the biological basis for religion is the impact of the way the human mind works. An interesting application of this is a phenomenon that appears to be common to all human religious systems, concepts of supernatural anthropomorphic causal agents within their environment. (The term **anthropomorphic** refers to things that are not human but have humanlike characteristics and behave in humanlike ways.) This is the core of the concept of animism, the belief in spirit beings, which was introduced earlier in this chapter.

One explanation for the development of a belief in spirit beings is based on the concept of theory of mind. **Theory of mind** refers to the idea that people know, or think they know,

what is going on in another people's minds. People recognize and often id
perceived feelings, desires, fears, and other emotions in other human beings. The
a theory of mind is thought to be what makes us human, although evidence sugges
may be some development of theory of mind in other animals, albeit on a very li
This is what allows people to explain other peoples' behavior and to predict wha
do in a particular situation. Thus a theory of mind is essential for the development
social patterns.

Many scholars believe that the human brain actually extends the theory of mind i
of animals and other living and nonliving entities. It is this extension that leads to anthro

Pascal Boyer has pointed out that although religious concepts do violate some expectations about the world, they do preserve other expectations. He focuses in particular on the social nature of human beings and the inferences that the human brain draws that regulate social interaction. For example, Boyer points out that gods and other supernatural agents are seen as being very human-like in cultures around the world. Yet there are obviously crucial differences. Boyer points out that gods differ from human in that they have access to all the possible information that is relevant to the issue at hand in a social interaction.

However, gods are rarely omniscient cross-culturally. For example, the idea that "God knows you are lying" seems more natural than "God knows the content of every refrigerator in

we will be seeking neither to prove nor to disprove but merely to observe. In

e philosopher Baruch Spinoza, writing in the seventeenth century, "I have made a not to ridicule, not to bewail, not to scorn human actions, but to understand them."

is the study of humanity. Anthro-
dy human societies as integrated
proach that is termed *holism*. This
een in the broad scope of anthro-
is often divided into the fields of
ropology, archaeology, linguistics,
anthropology. This approach
societies be studied over long peri-
during which the investigator lives
ommunity and participates in the

product is an ethnography, a descriptive study of a human society.

An outside observer of a community usually imposes his or her system of analysis on the group under study (etic perspective). It is natural to use one's own society as the basis for interpreting and judging other societies, a tendency called ethnocentrism. Many anthropologists attempt to see the world through the eyes of the people being studied (emic perspective) and describe and understand

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Summary

Anthropology
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to study what people believe, not whether or not what they believe is true.

A central concept in anthropology is culture. In 1871, Tylor wrote, "Culture . . . is that complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." Culture includes all aspects of the human experience that are passed down from generation to generation. Culture gives meaning to reality; we live in a real, physical world, but our minds interpret this world through a cultural lens and even create new realities.

Religion is a difficult concept to define when we try to include all human societies. An analytic definition focuses on the way in which religion manifests itself or is expressed in a culture. A functional definition is concerned with the role that religion plays in a society. Finally, an essentialist definition looks at what the essential nature of religion is and emphasizes the fact that religion is the domain of the extraordinary. Our definition looks at religion as a set of cultural beliefs and practices that usually include a basic set of characteristics and draws on elements of all three of these approaches.

There have been many theoretical approaches to the study of religion. The evolutionary approach, developed in the late 1800s, focused on the questions of when and how religions began and how they evolved from the simple to the complex. This evolution was seen as a natural consequence of human nature, and the religions of "primitive" peoples were remnants of an earlier, simpler evolutionary stage. Early religions included animism, the belief in spirits and ghosts, and animatism, the belief in a generalized supernatural force.

The Marxist approach is based on the writings of Karl Marx, who saw religion as being a construction of those in power, designed to divert people's attention from the miseries of their lives. This misery was seen as being the result of exploitation of the masses by those in power under the capitalist system. He saw religion both as a means of compensation and as a way of getting people to go along with a capitalist culture that is not in their best interests.

The functional approach asks the question: What does religion do? For example, Malinowski concluded that magic functions to provide control and certainty in an otherwise uncertain situation. The interpretive approach is associated with Clifford Geertz who believed that the task of anthropologists was to make sense of cultural systems by studying meaning. He described religion as a cluster of symbols that provides a charter for a culture's ideas, values, and way of life. Religious symbols help explain human existence by giving it an ultimate meaning. The psychosocial approach is concerned with the relationship between culture and personality and the connection between the society and the individual.

Many theorists have suggested that religion is a by-product of the functioning and evolution of the human brain. The brain is capable of creating new realities. The theory of mind is the idea that one knows what is going on in another person's mind. This leads to the attribution of humanlike qualities to nonhuman entities and forces, the basis for the development of a belief in spirit beings. Thus we infer purpose, goals, intention, and design throughout the universe.

Suggested Readings

Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).
[A cognitive anthropologist explains religion in terms of everyday thought processes.]

David J. Linden, *The Accidental Mind: How Brain Evolution Has Given Us Love, Memory, Dreams, and Gods* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).
[A neuroscientist discusses the functioning of the human brain and its relationship to religion, among other things.]

William Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992).

[An overview of theoretical approaches to religion.]

Carl Sagan, *The Demon Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996).
[A skeptical look at supernatural beliefs and phenomena.]

Michael Winkelman and John R. Baker, *Supernatural as Natural: A Biocultural Approach to Religion* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010).
[An introduction to the study of religion with an emphasis on evolution and neurology.]

Suggested Websites

www.aaanet.org
Website of the American Anthropological Association.

www.aaanet.org/sar
The Society for the Anthropology of Religion of the American Anthropological Association.

www.religioustolerance.org
Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance.

www.wamware.com/world-religions/map.htm
Map of religions in the world.

Study Questions

1. How does one go about conducting a holistic study of a society? How would this be different from a study on a specific topic?
2. We can examine human societies from an etic or an emic perspective. Do you think it is possible to really understand a society other than your own from an emic perspective?
3. How would you balance cultural relativism and universal human rights? Do you think that you could remain neutral in your judgment of all of the behaviors you might see in a small-scale society?
4. What is the basic difference between a society and a culture? Can these two terms be used interchangeably?
5. Think back to a ritual that you have attended—a wedding ceremony, for example. Write three brief descriptions from each of the following viewpoints: analytic, functional, and essentialist.
6. One of the major debates in studies of human behavior is that between nature (biology) and nurture (culture). Do you think that there is any biological basis for the development of religion in human societies? Do you think that someday someone might discover a society that has no religious practices?
7. Some scholars have argued that religion is not definable in any real sense. Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote: "We sometimes demand definitions for the sake not of their content, but of their form. Our requirement is an architectural one; the definition a kind of ornamental coping that supports nothing."[21] Discuss.

Endnotes

1. Note that we are using the ethnographic present in describing these cultures. Members of the California tribes no longer gather and process acorns, and their way of life is very similar to non–Native American peoples among whom they live.
2. *Sick Societies: Challenging the Myth of Primitive Harmony* by Robert B. Edgerton, p. 45. Copyright © 1992 by Robert B. Edgerton. Reprinted by permission of The Free Press, a Division of Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group. All rights reserved.
3. Ibid., p. 93.
4. E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom* (London: J. Murray, 1871), p. 1.
5. All Bible quotations in this text are taken from *The King James Bible*, except where otherwise noted.
6. N. Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (3rd ed.) (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), pp. 8–10.
7. C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 90.

8. M. E. Spiro, "Religion: Problems of Definitions and Explanations," in M. Banton (Ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966), p. 96.
9. W. C. Smith et al., *The Meaning and End of Religion* (San Francisco: Harper, 1978).
10. E. B. Tylor, op. cit.
11. R. R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religions* (London: Elibron Classics, 2005), first published in 1909.
12. J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: MacMillan, 1922).
13. K. Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (February, 1844).
14. É. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), first published in 1913.
15. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "Religion and Society," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society*, 75 (1945), pp. 33–43.
16. C. J. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), first published in 1973.
17. M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).
18. S. Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1953).
19. A. Abbott, "Blind Man Walking," *Nature News*, December 22, 2008. www.nature.com/news/2008/081222/full/news.2008.1328.html.
20. P. Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 161.
21. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1953), #217.

world. All of these elements—the land, the plants, the animals, people, and the gods—are bound together into a systematic and balanced whole. All of the elements within the universe affect one another, existing in a state of harmony.

For the universe to function—to maintain its harmonious state—people must behave properly as defined by Navaho culture. Failure to behave properly brings about disharmony in the universe, and this disharmony can lead to natural disaster, illness, and even death. The goal of a Navaho is to remain in harmony with the universe or, as they like to put it, to "walk in beauty."

Whereas Navaho culture sees humans as one cog in the natural world, Judeo-Christians see their world quite differently. Here humans occupy a very special place in the universe. The following is from the Eighth Psalm:

> What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?
>
> For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.
>
> Thou makest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:
>
> All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;
>
> The fowls of the air and the fishes of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

The reenactment of a creative event, for example, the healing wrought by a god in the beginning of time, is the common aim of myth and ritual. In this way the event is transferred to the present and its result, i.e. the healing of a sick person, can be achieved once more here and now. In this way, too, the world order, which was created in the primeval era and which is reflected in myths, preserves its value as an exemplar and model for the people of today.

Although the term *myth* is frequently used in our society in a negative sense to mean stories that are false or only told by primitive peoples, that is not the sense in which we use the term here. Anthropologists and folklorists use the term to refer to sacred religious stories that are believed by the people who tell them to be true. In this sense, the stories of the Bible are myths, as are the writings of the Qur'an.

This analytic distinction between different types of narratives is one that is also made by many cultural groups. For example, Trobriand Islanders distinguish between *kukwanebu* (fairy tales, fictional stories told after dark for amusement), *libwogwo* (legends, stories told to impart knowledge and believed to be true), and *liliu* (sacred stories told during the preparation for [illegible] rituals). [illegible] between true stories (myths and legends) and

Oral texts are frequently very long and complex. They are not always recited as a single, complete narrative and might not even be seen as a single entity. Particular segments might be recited at certain times in particular circumstances.

One of the consequences of the oral transmission of stories is that they are frequently unconsciously altered with each generation. As a result of this learning process, different versions of the same myth can exist in different families or groups within a society. For example, there are several versions of the Navaho creation story. Each was collected by a different anthropologist working with a different elder. Although they have much in common, there are major differences.

Myths may also change to account for new circumstances or events. Gregory Bateson gave an example from Bali of the development of a new myth that blended several previous stories. The new myth linked certain gods as siblings in ord

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tion tend to be very stable through time, especially if they are not tra
An example of a written text is the Qur'an, which forms the foundati
that the Qur'an represents the word of God as revealed to Mohamma
the early seventh century. It was spoken to Mohammad and was i
but was soon set down in written form. As the spoken word of God
recited and memorized by devout Muslims. Because the Qur'an
in Arabic, it is learned and memorized in Arabic throughout the Isla
lations of the Qur'an do exist, but they are not used in ritual. Com
made in the local language.) Because printing presses produce milli
identical in content, the exact text not only is found throughout the
unchanged generation after generation. For Muslims, this lack of cha
Muslims believe that the true text exists in heaven and was gi
revelations, which he memorized perfectly word for word. Thus th
means "recitation") represents a perfect transcription of God's visio

GENESIS. Many written texts have their origins in oral narrat

BOX 2.1 (Continued)

And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a helpmate for him.

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

The first story is recounted in Genesis 1:1 through 2:3. The story begins with the world covered with water ("And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"). God shapes the world over a period of six days, resting on the seventh. The order of creation of living things is plants, followed by animals, followed by male and female human beings together ("male and female created he them"). This story is from what biblical scholars call the P or priestly document. It was probably written before 586 B.C.E. It contains many parallels with the *Enuma elish*, a Mesopotamian myth, and establishes the origin and sacred importance of the Sabbath.

The second story is found in Genesis 2:4–2:10 and 2:15–2:23. At the beginning of the story, the world was a desert ("for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth"). God first "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into nostrils the breath of life." He places a man, called Adam, in the Garden of Eden. God then forms all the animals and brings them to Adam one at a time to be named. Finally, God creates woman, called Eve, from Adam's rib. This story comes from what is referred to as the J document. It was likely written earlier than the first story, sometime between 960 and 915 B.C.E.

The stories of Genesis are reflections of the Judeo-Christian worldview. They are very patriarchal in many ways. For example, woman (Eve) is derived from man (Adam). In many Western societies, men dominate woman, and many positions of authority, such as the priesthood, are restricted to men. Here the religious text is acting as a **social charter** that explains the proper organization of human relationships.

Genesis also expresses the Judeo-Christian worldview with respect to nature. This worldview appears to be based on two assumptions. The first is that the universe is mechanistic and humans are its master. The second is that humans are a categorically different form of creature than all other forms of life.

Changes do occur in written texts, but they are usually deliberate changes that are the consequences of translation or scholarly discourse over the meaning of particular words and passages. In some religious traditions, such as Christianity, the text—in this case, the Bible—is

in Latin. This was not seen as a problem, because the Church existed to interpret God's word. Later, the Protestant Reformation would emphasize the Bible, and not the Church, as the source for true Christianity. Among the central beliefs of Martin Luther, who began the Reformation, was that laypeople should read the Bible for themselves. This meant not only that everyone needed to learn to read, but also that the Bible had to be translated into the local languages.

Perhaps one of the most famous translations of the Bible was that ordered by King James I of England and published in 1611. The King James Bible is still widely used today. Many Bible scholars

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Bible that attempt to modernize the language yet retain the use of religious linguistic
Box 2.2 for a discussion of gender-neutral translations of the Bible.)

BOX 2.2

The Gender-Neutral Christian Bible

Written texts often exist in multiple versions. Zondervan, the world's largest publisher o
published over a dozen different translations. Some of the translations preserve mo
language, such as *thou,* and others attempt to translate the Bible into more modern la
area of debate with regard to modern translations is the issue of gender. The langu
most Christian Bibles not only refers to God as male but also uses the masculine gene
ing *man* to mean both men and women). Some argue that this language is not inc
and actually both reflects and shapes the way that people think. Changing this langua
a way to address the outdated gender roles portrayed in the Bible and help achieve ge

When Zondervan updated its *Revised Standard Version* (RSV) in 1990 as the
Standard Version, it was met with much opposition from Christians who felt the cha
were unnecessary, but in some cases changed the meaning of the text. For example,

the rest of culture? Do myths serve functions, and if so, which ones? Do myths reflect the way that the human mind works, the way a specific culture works, or both? Of the different ways of analyzing religious narratives, many are based on the different theoretical approaches to the study of religion discussed in Chapter 1.

SEARCHING FOR MYTH ORIGINS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. The evolutionary school in anthropology saw a unilinear progression from more "primitive" societies to more "civilized" ones. Accompanying this progression was a similar proposed progression from magic to religion to science. Myths were seen as belonging to the "primitive" period, with sacred myths being replaced by secular folktales until finally dying out altogether in "civilized" societies. (It is important to remember that anthropologists no longer believe in such an evolutionary progression or that cultures can be classified as "primitive" or "civilized.")

Theorists from the evolutionary school assumed that modern people living in small-scale societies lived and thought the same way that earlier European societies had. They compared myths found in many different cultures, looking for common elements from which they could reconstruct an assumed "original form" of myth from which all others had derived. It was believed that doing this could help explain puzzling aspects of modern European society.

The work of James George Frazer (1854–1941) is a good example of this approach. He collected as many examples of myths and magical practices from around the world as possible and published them as a thirteen-volume work entitled *The Golden Bough.* Although modern anthropologists criticize the information in *The Golden Bough* as taken out of its cultural context, the book is still widely read. As an example of the comparative approach, Frazer analyzed the story of the fall of man in Genesis by looking at other origin-of-death myths cross-culturally:[6]

white.[10] The division of the world into binary opposites can be seen cross-culturally in myths, as in the analysis done by Edmund Leach of the structure of the story of Genesis.[11] Examples of binary opposites contained in Genesis are light/dark, day/night, heaven/earth, man/animal, and man/woman. Leach also points out that these opposites are frequently mediated by a third, anomalous category, such as life and death being mediated by the third category of life after death.

In the following portion of Genesis, the binary opposites of light and dark as well as heaven and earth are established (Genesis 1:4–8):

> And God saw that the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.
>
> And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.
>
> And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.
>
> And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.
>
> And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

Structural analysis focuses on the structure, not content, of religious narratives. It demonstrates that stories that seem very different on the surface may have a similar underlying structure. We can also apply structural analysis to a story from the Gururumba of New Guinea (Melanesia culture area). The primary binary opposition in Gururumba culture is that of nature and culture. We can see this opposition being expressed in several ways in the Gururumba myth of the origin of women, told in Box 2.3.

From this story, we can see that the nature versus culture dichotomy is related to the differences between the sexes. Women are part of nature, whereas men are associated with culture. The origin of the first woman from an egg and her various reversions to animal forms when she is pursued clearly associate women with nature. The wild female is only culturally transformed through human (male) agency. The sugarcane is a symbolically male plant used to change the biologically nonuseful woman into a culturally useful wife. Her son is the first male born of a female, and thus not fully cultural, as can be seen when he turns into a fish. He is not a complete adult, both biologically and socially, until his final transformation in the men's house. The boy himself then becomes a transformer, changing his sisters into wives and other men into social allies.

Critics of structuralism argue that it is a very sterile approach to the study of religious narrative and that it is ultimately dehumanizing. Structural analysis can also be very complicated, leaving mythical analysis only to those who are well versed in this approach.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMBOLS IN MYTH. Another approach to the analysis of myths interprets them as being symbolic and sees this symbolism as being rooted in human psychology. This approach is based on the work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

Freud described various psychological defense mechanisms, such as projection, in which

BOX 2.4 (Continued)

ood to rid the earth of the wickedness

e a cycle of creations and destructions. The ancient Aztecs of existed prior to the present world, the fifth world. The following the fourth world.[18]

rth sun, the Sun of Water, the people grew very wicked and the gods. The gods became angry and Tlaloc, the god of e was going to destroy the world with a flood. However, out couple, Tata and Nena, and he warned them of the flood. llow out a great log and take two ears of corn—one for each ng more.

a entered the tree trunk with the two ears of corn, and it e rains subsided and Tata and Nena's log landed on dry

myth is the story of Noah's ar of man.

In many societies we se Mexico tell of four worlds that story tells of the destruction of

During the era of the fou ignored the worship of rains, announced that h Tlaloc was fond of a dev He instructed them to ho of them—and eat nothi

So Tata and Ner began to rain. When t

Tlaloc. It was only after their stomachs were full that they remembered Tlaloc's command.

Tlaloc then appeared to them and said, "This is how I am repaid for saving your lives?" They were then changed into dogs. It was at this point, where even the most righteous people were disobedient, that the gods destroyed the world, ushering in the present era of the Fifth Sun.

While the previous examples are of apocalyptic floods that took place in the mythological past, not all apocalypses involve floods and some involve predictions of future events. A good example comes from the New Testament in the Book of Revelations 21:1–9) Revelations focuses on a coming battle, both earthly and spiritual, between the forces of good and evil. The myth tells us that the "Lamb" of God (believed by most to be Jesus Christ) will save his people from a time of great tribulations on earth, destroy the wicked and usher in an age of peace in which his people will live in the presence of God and Christ in a heavenly city.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Much of the symbolism and story of Revelations is familiar to Americans even if they are unfamiliar with the source, including the four horsemen of the apocalypse, the lamb of God, the seven seals, the beast, the harlot of Babylon, and Satan and the lake of fire. As we will see in Chapter 11, Revelations is the basis for many new religious movements as individuals interpret modern-day happenings as being those foretold in the myth.

TRICKSTER MYTHS. Some myths tell of serious matters—the origins of the world—whereas others tell of lesser things, usually to provide explanations of why things are the way they are or

BOX 2.5 (Continued)

The Raven slithered down deep into her warm insides and found a soft, comfortable spot, where he transformed himself once more, this time into a very small human being, and went to sleep for a long while. And as he slept he grew.

The young girl didn't have any idea what was happening to her, and of course she didn't tell her father, who noticed nothing unusual because it was so dark—until suddenly he became very aware indeed of a new presence in the house, as the Raven at last emerged triumphantly in the shape of a human boychild.

He was—or would have been, if anyone could have seen him—a strange-looking boy, with a long, beaklike nose and a few feathers here and there. In addition, he had the shining eyes of the Raven, which would have given his face a bright, inquisitive appearance—if anyone could have seen these features then.

And he was noisy. He had a cry that contained all the noises of a spoiled child and an angry raven—yet he could sometimes speak as softly as the wind in the hemlock boughs, with an echo of that beautiful other sound, like an organic bell, which is also part of every raven's speech.

At times like that his grandfather grew to love this strange new member of his household and spent many hours playing with him, making him toys and inventing games for him.

As he gained more and more of the affection and confidence of the old man, the Raven felt more intently around the house, trying to find where the light was hidden. After much exploration, he was convinced it was kept in the big box which stood in the corner of the house. One day he cautiously lifted the lid, but of course could see nothing, and all he could feel was another box. His grandfather, however, heard his precious treasure chest being disturbed and dealt very harshly with the would-be thief, threatening dire punishment if the Ravenchild ever touched the box again.

This triggered a tidal wave of noisy protests, followed by tender importuning, in which the Raven never mentioned the light, but only pleaded for the largest box. That box, said the Ravenchild, was the one thing he needed to make him completely happy.

As most if not all grandfathers have done since the beginning, the old man finally yielded and gave his grandchild the outermost box. This contented the boy for a short time—but as most if not all grandchildren have done since the beginning, the Raven soon demanded the next box.

It took many days and much cajoling, carefully balanced with well-planned tantrums, but one by one the boxes were removed. When only a few were left, a strange radiance, never before seen, began to infuse the darkness of the house, disclosing vague shapes and their shadows, still too dim to have definite form. The Ravenchild then begged in his most pitiful voice to be allowed to hold the light for a just a moment.

His request was instantly refused, but of course in time his grandfather yielded. The old man lifted the light, in the form of a beautiful, incandescent ball, from the final box and tossed it to his grandson.

He had only a glimpse of the child on whom he had lavished such love and affection, for even as the light was traveling toward him, the child changed from his human form to a huge, shining black shadow, wings spread and beak open, waiting. The Raven snapped up the light in his jaws, thrust his great wings downward and shot through the smokehole of the house into the huge darkness of the world.

That world was at once transformed. Mountains and valleys were starkly silhouetted, the river sparkled with broken reflections, and everywhere life began to stir. And from far away, another great winged shape launched itself into the air, as light struck the eyes of the Eagle for the first time and showed him his target.

The Raven flew on, rejoicing in his wonderful new possession, admiring the effect it had on the world below, reveling in the experience of being able to se

doing so he dropped a good half of the light he was carrying. It fell to the rocky ground below and there broke into pieces—one large piece and too many small ones to count. They bounded back into the sky and remain there even today as the moon and the stars that glorify the night.

The Eagle pursued the Raven beyond the rim of the world, and there, exhausted by the long chase, the Raven finally let go of his last piece of light. Out beyond the rim of the world, it floated gently on the clouds and started up over the mountains lying to the east.

Its first rays caught the smokehole of the house by the river, where the old man sat weeping bitterly over the loss of his precious light and the treachery of his grandchild. But as the light reached in, he looked up and for the first time saw his daughter, who had been quietly sitting during all this time, completely bewildered by the rush of events.

The old man saw that she was as beautiful as the fronds of a hemlock against a spring sky at sunrise, and he began to feel a little better.

Source: From *The Raven Steals the Light,* by Bill Reid and Robert Bringhurst, published in 1988 by Douglas & McIntyre Ltd (now D&M Publishers, Inc.). Reprinted by permission of the publisher. U.S. rights courtesy of the University of Washington Press.

HERO MYTHS. Joseph Campbell (1904–1987) described the story of the hero's journey in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Box 2.6). The title refers to the fact that although there are thousands of different stories involving heroes throughout the world, they all follow the same basic story line, what Campbell calls the **monomyth**. Campbell describes the monomyth as follows: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."[19]

BOX 2.6 (Continued)

Despite this criticism from social scientists, Campbell is popular with the general public. Campbell recorded interviews with Bill Moyers that would air on PBS in 1988 and be published as *The Power of Myth*. During one such interview, the following exchange took place:

Bill Moyers: Do you ever have the sense of . . . being helped by hidden hands?

Joseph Campbell: All the time. It is miraculous. I even have a superstition that has grown on me as a result of invisible hands coming all the time—namely, that if you do follow your bliss you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. When you can see that, you begin to meet people who are in your field of bliss, and they open doors to you. I say, follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be.

After this, "follow your bliss" became a catchphrase for people who admired Campbell's ideas for finding meaning in life.

Source: Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth—with Bill Moyers* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 120.

The hero's journey is a common theme encountered in many myths. Sometimes the hero is based on a real person whose story has been idealized. Other times the hero has no basis in real life. The first stage of the hero's journey is the departure. The hero, frequently an orphaned youth, is thrust out of his or her community for one of several reasons, such as the destruction of his or her home by some supernatural force. The second phase, initiation, includes the hero's training, as he or she learns to utilize supernatural tools, such as a sacred sword, under the direction of a master, who frequently possesses supernatural power. In the third phase, the return, the hero returns and accomplishes the task. The monomyth is frequently found in origin stories, where the hero is responsible for bringing some knowledge to humans.

Entire religious systems may be based on a hero story. Buddhism is based on the story of the Prince Siddhartha Gautama. Gautama leads a very sheltered life in his father's palace until he becomes aware of sickness, suffering, and death and the fact that he too is subject to them. He leaves behind his worldly possessions and spends years wandering, fasting, and meditating. He learns all he can from various teachers, but nothing seems to appease his sorrow and emptiness. In desperation, he resolves to sit under a Bodhi tree until he finds the answers he has been looking for. He is attacked by Kama-Mara, the god of love and death, but is victorious. During his time under the tree, Gautama gains knowledge and enlightenment and is thereafter referred to as the Buddha, or the "Enlightened One."

The same monomyth structure is also frequently used in popular films, such as *Star Wars, The Wizard of Oz, The Matrix, The Lord of the Rings,* and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone.* Table 2.2 compares some elements that are common to some of these movies.

CONCLUSION

The most fundamental questions asked by human beings—about the nature of life, existence, and death—are answered in the religious narratives we tell. These stories both explain and structure

Study Questions

1. A society's worldview includes how that society sees the environment and its relationship to the environment. Do you think that two societies with

how are they different? How does the transmission of religious stories differ in these two societies?

3. Using the

CHAPTER 3

Religious Symbols

All animals communicate with one another. Most often, this communication is simple and very specific to the situation. A stimulus—such as the sight of a stranger, predator, or food—may bring about a response of some kind: threat, flight, or eating. However, the situation exists in the here and now. The reaction is an immediate response to the specific circumstances.

Humans also encounter strangers, predators, and food. However, the human response is more complex than that of other living creatures. Humans react to the presence of a stranger entering their midst, but the stranger may be seen as an enemy warrior, a merchant, or a monk—and will be dealt with appropriately. The reaction to a predator might be to prepare a spear for defense or to perform magical rites to ward off the danger. Humans feel hunger and respond to the presence of food, but many edible and nutritious foods are shunned because of cultural or religious prohibitions. All of these behaviors involve communication, be it storytelling, ritual, or the articulation of food prohibitions.

The complexity of human communication is made possible through the ability of humans to create and use symbols. Symbols permit people to discuss abstract topics and to talk about things in the past, in an envisioned future, or even in a supernatural world. The world of religion is a symbolic world.

WHAT IS A SYMBOL?

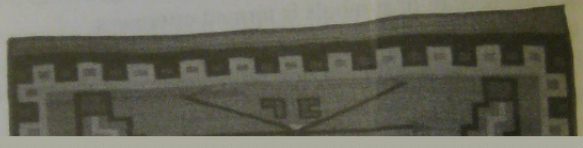
Let us begin by picking up an apple in our hand. We know that this is an apple by its shape, color, and smell, and we know what to do with it. Many nonhuman animals will react to an apple in very much the same way. Show an apple to a horse, and the horse will know by its shape, color, and smell exactly what it is and might take the apple from your hand and eat it. In this way, humans and other animals are very similar.

As humans, however, we can do something that horses cannot do. For example, we can draw a blue triangle on a piece of paper and declare that this blue triangle represents an apple. It certainly does not look like an apple or smell or taste like an apple, but as long as everyone in our community accepts the idea that a blue triangle stands for an apple, we can use it in place of a real apple in communication. If we have a fruit stand at an outdoor market, we can fly a banner with a blue triangle above our booth so that people will know that we have apples for sale.

from the ark with great ceremony to be read. In Tantric Buddhism, found in Tibet, words or formulas have great spiritual power, which builds as they are chanted over and over. Elements of music and dance and of space and time can also serve as symbols. We will begin our discussion of symbols by looking at basic artistic representations.

THE SWASTIKA. A symbol such as the **swastika** can stand for very complex ideas and can carry great emotional resonance. Most Americans and Europeans looking at the swastika experience anger or dread. In 1919, the German Nazi Party adopted the swastika as its symbol. Because of this the swastika has been associated with the terrible events perpetrated by the Nazis in World War II. A swastika spray-painted on a wall is often defined in law as a hate crime.

The swastika is a religious symbol that is found in a great many religious systems (Figure 3.1). It is basically a pattern of lines set at right angles to one another and, as such, carries no inherent meaning. It occurs in many versions—clockwise and counterclockwise, for example. The term is derived from the Sanskrit *su* ("good") and *avasti* ("to exist"). The swastika is seen in the religious art associated with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. It is also found in the ancient art



Jesus referred to the apostles as "fishers of men." The most commonly given reason, though, is that the letters of the Greek word for fish, *icthus*, form an **acrostic**. An *acrostic* is a word that is derived from the first letter of a series of words. So *icthus* is derived from *Iesous Christos Theou Uiou Soter* ("Jesus Christ of God the Son the Savior"). In the early days, when Christians were a small, persecuted group, the symbol served as a type of password. One person would draw the first arc in the sand, and if the second person was also Christian, he or she would draw the second arc to complete the fish.

BOX 3.1

Religious Toys and Games

Bible action figures, Buddha plush toys, a mosque building set, plush plagues bag, Catholicopoly, Kosherland (based on the board game Candyland), and Missionary Conquest (based on the board game Risk) are just a few of the many religiously themed games, dolls, and toys in the marketplace. Some are satirical and meant solely for amusement (e.g., Nunzilla dolls, Lookin' Good for Jesus bath products, and Holy Toast bread stamp). Others are intended to transmit the narratives and worldview of a religion.

Colors, images, and the rules of play are all symbolic. The game pieces in Catholicopoly include a dove and a lamb. In the Buddhist version of the game snakes and ladders, ethical actions move the player upward toward enlightenment, while selfish behaviors move one lower toward rebirth as a lower life form. Nikki Bado-Fralick and Rebecca Sachs Norris write:[a]

> All elements of the games communicate. Not only the components that are designed to intentionally instill values or knowledge, such as cards or board design, but every element of the game, from the box to the directions, can be read as cultural text. For example, games that have long or complicated directions are usually from hierarchical or highly regulated religions. This makes sense, since the designers have included what they consider to be important, and in these religions rules and principles are fundamental and crucial constituents. Unlike the intentional symbols and meanings embedded in religious games, directions are more s[illegible]

SACRED ART

Although the swastika, pentagram, cross, and other simple symbols are important representations in their respective religious systems, they are usually elements found in more complex settings or works of art. Imagine, for example, walking into a great European cathedral with its massive stained glass windows, statuary, and paintings, all containing a myriad of symbols, or walking through a Buddhist temple in Thailand, with its many representations of the figure of Buddha, each with its own complex meaning and referents.

The Sarcophagus of Lord Pakal

Artistic representations are often used to illustrate and supplement religious texts. The following is an archaeological example from the ancient Maya of southern Mexico in the Mesoamerica culture area. Although contemporary Mayan religion has many parallels with the ancient Mayan religion, contemporary studies can provide only a limited understanding of ancient Mayan art. The fact that we can know as much as we do about the ancient Maya is because they built monumental buildings, chiseled great works of art into stone, developed a sophisticated calendar, and had a system of writing. However, not all Mayan symbols have been deciphered, and much remains to be learned.

In 1949, the Mexican archaeologist Alberto Ruiz Lhuillier was working in the Temple of the Inscriptions at the site of Palenque. Like most Mayan temples, it was built on top of a large pyramid. While working in the temple, Lhuillier discovered a staircase under the floor leading to a room containing a large stone sarcophagus richly carved with Mayan pictures and writing (Figure 3.4). The cover was removed to reveal the skeleton of a man, that of one of the greatest kings to rule Palenque. His name was K'inich Janahlo Pakal, Pakal the Great, or Lord Shield. He died at the age of eighty on August 31, 683, after having ruled for sixty-seven years.

As we in the twenty-first century look at this carving from the seventh century, especially if we have never encountered Mayan art before, we probably recognize only a few elements—perhaps a reclining figure and a bird near the top. Of course, if we were aristocratic Maya living in the seventh century, the meaning of all of these elements would be known to us. Our fathers would have taken us to the temple precinct to show us the various motifs carved into the stone and to explain their meaning. As aristocrats, we also would undoubtedly have attended religious classes or received tutoring from the priests.

This carving is important to modern scholars because it is a visual representation of the Mayan cosmos. We cannot explain all of the elements, and limited space here prevents us from offering a complete explanation of what we do know, but let us examine some of the elements as examples of how symbolic representations are used to create a virtual supernatural world.

Near the base of the carving is an image of a skeletal snake. The skull of the "White-Bone-Snake" has been slit and spread out. The open jaws of the serpent form the portal that connects the world of the living with Xibalba, the world of the dead. We see Pakal at the moment of his death descending into the serpent's jaws as he moves from the world of the living into the world of the dead.

Behind the figure of Pakal, appearing to be growing out of the serpent's jaw, is the Cosmic Tree, which is the central axis of the world. The tree is rooted in the underworld; behind Pakal is the Middle World, which is the world inhabited by people; the upper parts of the tree reach into the heavens. Many of the representations in the upper portion of the tree represent constellations and heavenly bodies. For example, what appear to be branches that end in square-nosed serpents, flowers, and other symbols represent the Milky Way. The bird perched at the top of the tree is the companion of one of the gods involved with the creation of the world. We know this because of various symbols carved on the bird, such as a necklace and the "ribbon" in its beak.

YORUBA COLOR TERMINOLOGY. The language of the Yoruba of Nigeria in the Guinea Coast culture area has only three basic color terms. Each term covers a much larger part of the color spectrum than do English color terms. *Funfun* includes what English speakers call white, silver, and pale gray. *Pupa* covers red, pink, orange, and deep yellow. *Dúdú* includes black, blue, purple, green, dark brown, red-brown, and dark gray.

In the English language, colors evoke emotions. We say that a sad person is feeling blue; when angry, we see red; a jealous person is green with envy; a coward is yellow. The Yoruba also associate colors with particular temperatures and temperaments. For example, *funfun* is associated with coolness, age, and wisdom; *pupa* evokes hotness; *dúdú* is dark and warm.

The supernatural world of the Yoruba is populated by many spiritual beings called *orisha.* (The *orisha* will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9.) Obatala, the king of the *orisha,* an ethical and merciful deity, is linked to the color *funfun,* the color of wisdom and respect. Objects associa

lunar cycle into four quarters. In other words, concepts such as "a week" are nonphysical symbols that stand for particular periods of time. Many of these periods do not exist in the real world, but only in the human mind.

Time is an important element of religious rituals. Many rituals are performed at specific moments of time, often as part of a ceremonial cycle. As we will see in the next section, time often has important symbolic meaning.

THE MAYAN VIEW OF TIME. The passage of time had a deep religious significance for the ancient Maya of southern Mexico and Central America. They developed several systems of marking time that intersected with one another to form a complex calendar. Like many peoples, the Maya had a calendrical system based on the solar year consisting of about 365 days. The Maya divided their year into eighteen months of twenty days and a nineteenth month of five days. Each month was named, and each day within a month was numbered. A particular day was named by a combination of its numerical position within the month and the name of the month, just as we do.

The solar year is a natural unit that is determined by the movements of the sun in the sky throughout the year. However, the Maya developed a second kind of year of 260 days that was constructed from a cycle of twenty day names and a second cycle of thirteen numbers. A particular day was known by a number and a day name. The twenty-day cycle of day names and the

Another example of periodic rituals being set to older calendars is the *Yamim Nora'im* (Days of Awe), or Jewish high holy days, which are observed for a ten-day period between the first and tenth days of the month of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) marks the beginning of this time period, and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) marks the end. These are considered to be the most important of all the Jewish holidays and are the only Jewish holidays that are purely religious and not based on any historical or natural event.

The high holy days are a time for penitence and prayer during which Jews are given time to repent of their sins against God and ask God for forgiveness. On Rosh Hashanah, God judges the people and records His judgment in the Book of Life. However, there is a ten-day reprieve until Yom Kippur, when the Book is closed and sealed. Yom Kippur itself is a day for fasting and prayer.

The Hebrew calendar is also a lunar calendar. But in order to keep the holidays from shifting too far, a thirteenth month is added every two or three years. In some years, extra days are added to prevent Yom Kippur from occurring on the Sabbath. Thus the major ceremonies are maintained within specific seasons of the year.

Other times, not related to a specific calendar, may also have religious significance. A common example is the time following a death. In Judaism, this period of mourning is called *shiva*. *Shiva* begins as soon as the mourner has returned from the cemetery and lasts for seven days. During this time, the mourner remains at home and does not participate in any of his or her normal activities, such as work or school. Friends and relatives visit the home of the mourners and often bring food.

[redacted] correlated with the Jewish cele-

The term *totem* comes from the Ojibwa language of Canada, in which the word *ototeman* can be translated as "He is a relative of mine." This refers to particular animal species, known as totems, that become associated with Ojibwa clans, a type of kinship group. The clans are given the name of the totem.

TOTEMISM AND THE DREAM TIME. Perhaps the best-known examples of totemism come from Australian aboriginal groups. The totemic system has many components, including totemic symbols, myths, and a sacred landscape.

In contrast to isolated sacred sites, which are often the sites of pilgrimages, indigenous peoples live on a sacred landscape. The places described in their myths are places that exist in their own physical world—a stream, a cave, a mountain. And their origin stories tell of the creation of this landscape and the creation of the plants, animals, and people who inhabit it.

The creation myths of the Australian Aborigines begin in the dim past during the Dream Time with the creation of an earth without features, an earth devoid of mountains, rivers, and plains. Supernatural creatures then appeared on the earth. These creatures of the Dream Time appeared from under the earth or, among coastal groups, on rafts. They then traveled over the landscape, creating the world as we see it today—the physical world, the plants, the animals, the people—as well as the customs that govern people's lives. They then left the surface of the earth or turned themselves into some object in the landscape, such as a boulder or hill. The places that are associated with particular mythological beings are today sacred spaces that play important roles in religious rituals. The landscape in which the Aborigines live is a canvas on which their mythology is written, and various features of this landscape serve to define the nature of humanity.

The stories of the Dream Time establish special relationships between humans and animals, for both types of creatures are descendants of the same supernatural being that was neither human nor animal. Thus the tie of kinship is extended to the animal world and to the rest of the living world as well as the physical landscape. These animals, plants, and natural objects are the totems of the community. Any particular place, be it a water hole or a hill, can be associated with a particular story and can be claimed as part of the religious heritage of a particular group of people.

Within a community, different groups of people share different totems. Totems exist for bands, clans, the sexes, and even individuals. Claiming a totem brings with it special obligations. One is a prohibition against eating the flesh of one's totemic animal. It is acceptable for other members of the community, even your spouse and children, to eat of your totem, but not for you because you share a special relationship with the totemic species. However, the flesh of one's totem may be consumed as part of a ritual. Members of a totemic group have responsibilities to perform religious ceremonies, including initiation ceremonies. There are many other rules that are part of the special relationship between an individual or group and its totem.

Totemic affiliations also organize Australian society. Specific clans are associated with particular totems. There are rules regulating who can marry whom. Complex rules define the affiliation of one's children as well as the appropriate social behaviors between different classes of kin.

The determination of the group into which a child is born can be complex. In some groups it is determined by rules of kinship. In many groups the pregnancy is thought to be the result of a totemic spirit, perhaps residing in a sacred water hole, entering the womb of the woman. The husband and other elders will question the woman to determine which spirit from what totemic group entered her womb to determine that child's affiliation. In some groups the identity of the spirit is revealed in the father's dream. On death, the individual's soul returns to the totemic well.

At some point, young men are initiated into manhood. These initiation rituals involve the learning of ritual knowledge, including the ability to look at and handle totemic objects. These

rituals also involve some type of alteration of the body, such as circumcision or the knocking out of a tooth. When visiting sacred places described in the Dream Time stories, wounds are opened or new wounds are made on the body, and a person's blood is allowed to fall on sacred objects.

Australian Aborigine culture has a rich tradition of symbolic religious art. This art includes arrangements of stones, decoration of sacred objects, bark paintings, and rock art. Sacred spaces, especially caves and rock overhangs, are decorated with paintings and engravings; some may be as old as 30,000 or older. Many of these were done by men as representations of totemic creatures, objects, and events; others were thought to have been completed by the totemic beings during the Dream Time. Some are said to actually represent totemic beings who turned to stone or became paintings on a wall.

MURNGIN TOTEMISM. Today much of the culture of the Australian Aborigines has been lost owing to depopulation and the influence of Western culture. Early descriptions of Aborigine peoples offer a rare glimpse into their lives. One of these early reports is that of W. Lloyd Warner, who lived among the Murngin between 1926 and 1929.[3] They lived in the northern and eastern regions of Arnhem Land in the north of Australia.

Murngin society is composed of several clans. Each clan is associated with a specific territory as well as several totems. Within each territory are one or more sacred water holes that play an important role in Murngin religion. There are two classes of water holes—one sacred and one not. The sacred ones were made by higher totems. Only initiated men may approach these areas. Many are sites where important events occurred during the Dream Time, and totemic spirits reside there.

Beneath the clan water hole, residing in waters under the earth, dwell the ancestors of the Dream Time and totemic spirits. The spirits have the form of very small fish. A spirit will then appear to a man in a dream and ask the man who his wife is so that the spirit may enter her womb. A father may also know of this by some peculiar action of an animal. If an infant dies, its spirit returns to the water hole and, after a period of time, returns to the womb of the same mother. When any other person dies, his or her spirit goes back to the water hole, where it remains a spirit forever.

Murngin mythology is very complex and consists of many interrelated stories and rituals. One of the important myth cycles is the one that tells the story of the Djunkgao sisters. These mythological sisters appeared on a raft, walked over the landscape with their two yam sticks (long, pointed sticks used to dig food out of the ground), and then disappeared beneath the earth. As they traveled, various plants and animals were "named" or created. They made the islands off the coast, and they made totemic emblems, the sacred objects that are used in ritual.

THE SYMBOLISM OF MUSIC AND DANCE

Music and dance play special roles in religious rituals. The degree to which music and dance are included in ritual is quite variable. Some rituals simply include a song; others focus on an elaborate performance of a myth in song and dance. Music and dance can be thought of as symbols as stories are told through movement and through music motifs.

The Symbolism of Music

Music is a key element in ritual. It may simply set the mood for a ceremony or may actually be the primary vehicle by which religious stories are told and by which people communicate with the gods. Music fulfills many roles during religious rituals and is used to teach, to express or

engender emotional states, to produce altered states of consciousness, to please the supernatural powers, or to make contact with them.

An important function of music is the facilitation of memorization. In nonliterate societies, large amounts of narrative must be committed to memory. Anyone who has had to memorize a piece of prose in school knows how difficult this can be. Poetry is easier to memorize than prose because poetry has rhythm and rhyme. The easiest of all to memorize are the lyrics to a song. For this reason, narratives and prayers are frequently chanted or sung.

Of course, music also sets the mood for a ritual. The organ setting the mood for a funeral, a choir singing a medieval chant, the rejoicing of a gospel hymn—all illustrate the power of music to set the ambience for ritual. We use music in a similar way for secular purposes. Compare the music you would select to listen to while studying with the music you would play when having friends over for a party or a date for a romantic evening. Movies continually use music to set the emotional tone. We know when to be happy, sad, or frightened on the basis of the music on the soundtrack.

Many early Christian missionaries understood the influence of music and brought pianos and organs with them to remote areas of the globe. A small organ might have been played in a crude bush church set in the middle of a tropical rain forest. However, these missionaries were making the assumption that the various types of music that we produce reflect universals in moods and emotions.

A somber hymn played on an organ reflects the sadness of a funeral, and a romping gospel hymn expresses the joy of closeness with God. We could assume that Euro-American religious, military, or love music will evoke the same emotional response in all societies throughout the world. This assumption, however, turns out not to be true. In reality, Euro-American music often fails to convey its intended meaning to non-Westerners, and native musical idioms fail to move outsiders. Of course, the meaning of music is symbolic, and as such, it is part of the learned traditions of a culture.

Realizing this basic fact, many missionaries and many contemporary musicians are writing music in traditional idioms and are discovering and importing tribal musical traditions into contemporary music. This is an example of **syncretism**, the fusion of elements from two different cultures. For example, the well-known Congolese composition *Missa Luba* is a Catholic Mass sung in Latin but set to music elements and instruments of the Kongo tribe of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). African drumming, Australian Aborigine songs, and Native American flute playing have all been integrated into new musical experiences.

MUSIC IN RITUAL. Music plays important roles in the lives of foraging peoples. Colin Turnbull studied the Mbuti Pgymies of the Ituri Forest in the Congo and recorded their music in the 1950s. The Mbuti sing throughout their day and hunters, walking in the dense tropical forest, will use song as a way of maintaining contact with one another. The !Kung San of Botswana utilize song in their healing rituals. Several times a month they will gather around a fire in the evening and start singing. Some members of their group, primarily men, begin to dance around the singers and enter an altered state of consciousness called *!kia*. Once they reach this stage they move around the fire laying hands on each individual as healing ritual (see Figure 5.2 on page 113).

In some cultures the actual musical sounds may be interpreted as sounds of the supernatural. The sound may be produced either vocally or instrumentally. One example of this is the Tuva (Siberian culture area). For the Tuva, spiritual power is found in nature. These spirits manifest themselves both through physical appearance and by the sounds they make or that can be made through human interaction. Examples would be the sound of running water or the echo of a human

communication between the deity and the human participants. For example, possession is an important feature of Vodou. During a Vodou ritual, a song is sung to summon a particular god. When the god arrives, he or she possesses one of the dancers. A common metaphor is that the dancer is a horse on which the deity rides. Which god has possessed a dancer can be deduced by the dancer's movements and actions. (We will discuss the Vodou religion in more detail in Chapter 11.)

Early in the history of Islam, a group that was most interested in the mystical aspects of the religion broke off to form the Sufi. One of the most important of the Sufi mystics was a man named Mevlana Rumi, who lived in the thirteenth-century Ottoman Empire. Rumi founded the Mevlevi Order and revived the practice of whirling. The members of the Mevlevi Order are often called "whirling dervishes" by people in the West. They wear long white skirts that billow out as the dancers, their arms extended in the air, continue to turn. Through this whirling, the dancers seek to become one with God.

The Tewa, a Pueblo group from the Southwest culture area, say that they dance to "seek life," "regain life," or "renew life." Many symbolic references to this theme of new life can be found in the movements of the dancers, the costumes that are worn, and the songs that are sung. Dancers lift their arms upward to symbolize the welcoming of rain; lower their arms to indicate digging, planting, or harvesting; and move their arms from side to side to symbolize rainbows or clouds. Costume designs are also symbolic. Long tassels represent raindrops; woven headdresses contain depictions of squash blossoms or embroidered layers of clouds. The songs that accompany the dances make references to dawn, youth, flowers, and growing corn. The Tewa practice agriculture in a very arid environment, so references to rain and items associated with rain such as clouds, thunder, and rainbows are important symbols of life.

Tewa dances are generally held in open plazas where performers can be in contact with the earth. The dancers array themselves in long, parallel lines and move in unison to the beat of one or more drums. The dancers themselves may sing or a chorus of singers standing nearby may accompany them. Before the dance, the participants prepare in a **kiva**, an underground room that is entered from a hole in the roof. When the dance is about to begin, the dancers emerge from the kiva and move to the plaza. This is a symbolic reference to the Tewa origin story that tells how

The image of Pakal descending into the underworld to be reborn also refers to a portion of the *Popul Vuh*. The story tells of twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, who disturb the Lords of Death by playing a ball game. They are summoned to Xibalba to participate in a series of trials, but they [illegible] cunning and are then reborn.

[illegible] story, *yin* and *yang* were held together in a cosmic egg [illegible] elements cracked the shell. A creature called P'an Ku took [illegible] sometimes referred to as the child of *yin* and *yang* or as the [illegible] Ku emerges from the egg and goes about creating the world, [illegible] earth using an adze or a hammer and chisel. But the creation [illegible] P'an Ku dies, whereupon his body gives rise to various [illegible] some of the sky, and his flesh becomes the soil of the earth.

In an ancient Chinese creatio[illegible] until the struggle of the opposing e[illegible] form inside the egg. P'an Ku is so[illegible] giant of Chinese mythology. P'an K[illegible] in several versions fashioning the e[illegible] of the world is not complete unti[illegible] elements. His skull becomes the d[illegible]

His bones become rock; his blood, rivers; his breath, the winds; and his eyes, the sun and the moon. The fleas and parasites on his body became the ancestors of modern human groups.

These connections between symbol, myth, and worldview will continue to be important as we add one more element to the mix: ritual. In the next chapter, we will discuss rituals and the ways they are intimately connected with symbols, myth, and worldview.

Summary

A symbol is something that stands for something else. Symbols enable us to talk about things that are not immediately in front of us and to create our own realities. They are important elements in religious practice, and religious rituals center on the manipulation of symbols.

Symbols can appear in many forms. Language is symbolic in nature, because various speech sounds are used to create combinations that have meaning. Yet there is nothing of the referent that is inherent in the sound combination—its meaning is part of a cultural tradition. Recitation of religious narratives is an important feature of religious practices. Religious ideas also can be expressed in art that may contain many symbolic elements. Much artistic representation is arbitrary in that the nature of the symbol does not always communicate its meaning. Simple examples are the swastika, the pentagram, and the cross. Although an outsider might have difficulty understanding a piece of religious art, a member of that culture would have no such difficulty.

Time and space are also treated symbolically. Many units of time, such as our week and the several cycles of Mayan time, are arbitrary and provide time with deep meaning. Calendar systems exist as a way of symbolically organizing time and for scheduling periodic rituals. Space is also full of symbolic meaning, especially when mythological events are seen as occurring on the landscape. Such a sacred landscape is a part of the totemic system found among the Australian Aborigines.

Music and dance are also symbolic and are important elements in religious ritual. Musical elements suggest emotions and have symbolic meanings. What is considered to be religious music in one community might not be in another. Dance, composed of music, movement, costume and masks, and props and sets, is often used to tell religious stories in societies where such stories are not written down. All of these elements—language, art, music, and dance—interact to provide rich religious experiences.

Suggested Readings

Nikki Bado-Fralick and Rebecca Sachs Norris, *Toying with God: The World of Religious Games and Dolls* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2010).
[This book looks at religious games and dolls and the blending of religious symbols with popular culture.]

Norine Dresser, *Multicultural Celebrations* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999).
[This is a practical book on the appropriate etiquette for celebrations in various ethnic traditions in the United States, useful in our multicultural society.]

Carl G. Liungman, *Dictionary of Symbols* (New York: Norton, 1991).
[This is one of several compilations of symbols that are useful reference tools.]

Gananath Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair: An Essay of Personal Symbols and Religious Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
[A psychological anthropologist examines the use of symbols by Sri Lankan ascetics.]

Fiction

Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me Ultima* (New York: Warner Books, 1999).
[In a story filled with religious symbolism, a boy grows up in New Mexico in the 1940s.]

Suggested Websites

http://symbols.net
A comprehensive listing of websites that deal with symbols in various contexts including religion.

www.planetgast.net/symbols
Symbols in Christian Art and Architecture.

www.cem.va.gov/hm/hmemb.asp
United States Department of Veterans Affairs Available Emblems of Belief for Placement on Government Headstones and Markers.

www.ridingthebeast.com/articles/colors
Color Symbolism and Meaning in the Bible.

www.webexhibits.org/calendars/calendar.html
A web exhibit of calendars through the ages (including the Mayan Calendar).

www.mayacalendar.com/mayacalendar.html
A discussion of the Mayan calendar on the Maya World Studies Center website.

http://guides.lib.washington.edu/ethnomusicology
A list of websites related to ethnomusicology, folk music, and world music from the University of Washington.

www.folkways.si.edu/
Smithsonian Folkways makes available a wide variety of recordings of ethnic music.

http://sounds.bl.uk/
Archival Sounds Recordings (British Library) provides access to a great many recordings of music from around the world.

Study Questions

1. Logos and trademarks are examples of symbols that are important in American society. Select some examples and show how they express a particular emotion or idea about the product being advertised.
2. Historically, symbols can be very powerful and can evoke great emotions. This is especially true of religious symbols. List some religious and political symbols, and describe what roles they have played in human history.
3. Color has meaning in all cultures. How are colors used in American society to convey meaning? What are some of the social rules that determine the use of color in our society (e.g., a bride wears white)? Do you know of any differences in the meaning of color in other cultures?
4. How are totemism and the concept of Dream Time a social charter for Australian Aborigine cultures? How do you think these cultures would react to the presence of non-Aborigine cultures, such as those represented by missionaries?
5. Many American organizations are identified with particular animals. For example, colleges and professional football teams are often associated with a mascot, usually some kind of animal. What animals are usually used as college and team mascots? Why are those particular animals used and not others? When you go to a football or baseball game, what ritual activities revolve around the mascot animal? How does this differ from an Australian totem?
6. Describe the role of music in American culture. In what situations do you find music being played? Why is music played in these situations?
7. Choose a religious symbol that you are familiar with and describe its meaning. How is this symbol connected to the myths and worldview of the culture in which it is found?

Endnotes

1. J. Church, *Language and the Discovery of Reality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 95.
2. G. A. Reichard, *Navaho Religion: A Study of Symbolism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 206.
3. W. L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, revised edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).
4. D. Tedlock (translator), *Popul Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), p. 79.

CHAPTER

4

Ritual

The alarm clock rings. You reluctantly jump out of bed and begin your morning routine, which might include showering, shaving or putting on your makeup, reading the newspaper, and eating breakfast. You probably do the same things in the same order day after day—or at least on weekdays. This patterned, recurring sequence of events may be termed a **ritual**.

The term *ritual* can refer to any repetitive sequence of acts. Psychologists use the term when referring to repetitive compulsive activity, such as the ritual of washing one's hands dozens of times a day. A class might begin with the ritual of calling role and making announcements. However, when the ritual involves the manipulation of religious symbols such as prayers, offerings, and readings of sacred literature, we call it a **religious ritual**.

THE BASICS OF RITUAL PERFORMANCE

In some ways a ritual resembles a play. A play consists of actors, words, sets, and props presented in a set way according to a script. And a play is a reflection of the culture of a society and that society's worldview.

A public religious ritual also consists of actors (shamans and priests, for example), words (perhaps a prayer, a spell, or a sermon), sets (such as an altar), and props (such as candles, religious books, or masks) and may contain music and dance as well. Smaller-scale rituals, such as that performed by a shaman affecting a cure, also have many of these elements, although here the similarity to a play is not as strong. Of course, a religious ritual is much more than a play. Its primary purpose is not to entertain—although in some societies rituals are an important form of entertainment—and the audience is an active participant.

Two of the most basic elements in religious practices are ritual and myth, and the two are often closely connected. Ritual is often based on myth in that the directive to perform the ritual may lie within the myth. The myth provides the elements for the development of the ritual. There is some debate over which came first. Myth is reflected in ritual; other rituals are reenactments of myth.

A society's mythology consists of stories that reflect the underlying worldview of the society. Although few people in a community can articulate in a philosophical or theological manner the basic themes and underpinnings of their religious system, everyone is familiar with the myths of their religion and accepts the basic truths of the religious system. This is also true of rituals.

THE NAVAHO. As we discussed in Chapter 2, the Navaho worldview stresses the importance of balance and harmony. When this balance is upset, something bad, usually illness, is the result. Balance is upset by human actions, and the specific nature of the transgression will determine how the illness will manifest itself. The Navaho have separate specialists for diagnosis and treatment. Diagnosis is done by hand tremblers, who are generally women. The healers are usually men.

The entire family or even the entire community will gather together for the therapy ritual, which lasts anywhere from one to nine days. Prayers, medicine, songs, and herbs in addition to sand paintings are used to restore balance and harmony and thus cure the illness (Figure 4.1). The Navaho word for sand painting is *ikaah,* which means "a summoning of the gods." They believe that if a prayer is offered with a good heart and is correct in every detail, the gods are compelled to answer it. If they do not answer, there must have been some imperfection in the sand painting or the ceremony.

The sand painting itself depicts a specific portion of the complex Navaho mythology. Usually, this is a story of a hero who encounters some misfortune, but with help from others, usually a supernatural being, the hero recovers and learns how to heal the same problem in others. The story also is recounted in long, complex chants. This example again shows the relationship between ritual, myth, and worldview.

Anti-therapy rituals are rituals that bri

However, when directed toward an enemy, an anti-therapy ritual may support an objective of the society. Among the Yanomamö of northern South America, warfare is carried out with spears and arrows, as well as through ritual activities that send illness-causing spirits into the bodies of their enemies.

An anti-therapy ritual of the Fore of New Guinea was described in Chapter 1. A sorcerer takes something connected to the victim, such as a piece of clothing, and places it in a bundle, recites a spell, and puts the bundle in the cold, muddy ground. As a result, the victim becomes ill with the disease *kuru*.

Perhaps one of the best-known examples of an anti-therapy ritual is the bone-pointing ritual found among the Australian Aborigines. This is sometimes referred to as a **cursing ritual**. Taking a kangaroo bone, the individual performing the ritual sharpens one end and drills a hole through the other. He takes a strand of the victim's hair, and puts it through the hole and secures it with a knot. Then, in public, the performer points the bone at the victim. Here is a description of what happens next.[4]

> A man who discovers that he is being boned by an enemy is, indeed, a pitiable sight. He stands aghast, with his eyes staring at the treacherous pointer, and with his hands lifted as though to ward off the lethal medium, which he imagines is pouring into his body. His cheeks blanch and his eyes become glassy, and the expression on his face becomes horribly distorted. . . . He attempts to shriek, but usually the sound chokes in his throat, and all one might see is froth at his mouth. His body begins to tremble and the muscles twist involuntarily. He sways backwards and falls to the ground, and for a short time appears to be in a swoon; but soon after he begins to writhe as if in mortal agony, and covering his face with his hands, begins to moan. After a while he becomes more composed and crawls to his wurley [hut]. From this time onwards he sickens and frets, refusing to eat, and keeping aloof from the daily affairs of the tribe. Unless help is forthcoming in the shape of a counter-charm, administered by the hands of the "Nangarri," or medicine-man, his death is only a matter of a comparatively short time.

Salvation Rituals

Salvation rituals focus on the religious experience of an individual. It is a broad category that includes a number of rituals in which an individual is changed in some way, temporarily or permanently. One example would be a ritual involving spirit possession in which, as a central part of the ritual, the individual's body is temporarily taken over by some god or spirit. Or perhaps the main focus of the ritual is to have some mystical experience such as those achieved in an altered state of consciousness (Chapter 5). Sometimes the change is permanent, as when a shaman is being initiated. This group of rituals also includes rituals to counter the effects of breaking a tabu or some other religious obligation. Several examples of salvation rituals will be given in later chapters, including the use of peyote among the Huichol and in the Native American Church (Chapter 5) and spirit possession in Vodou (Chapter 11).

Revitalization Rituals

Revitalization rituals are associated with revitalization movements. These include nativistic movements, which focus on the elimination of alien customs and a return to the native way of

THE STRUCTURE OF A RITE OF PASSAGE. A familiar example of a rite of passage is the wedding in the United States, which actually consists of a series of rituals performed over a period of time. Although there is considerable variation among various segments of U.S. society, there is a general pattern found in many weddings. We will use this example to describe the structure of a rite of passage.

Anthropologists identify three phases in the typical rite of passage. The first phase is called **separation**. In this phase the individual is removed from his or her former status. In some rituals this is an abrupt separation of the individual from the community; in others it may take place over a longer period of time.

For weddings in the United States, the separation phase is actually a series of events that take place over the period of time preceding the ceremony. A typical wedding cycle might begin with an engagement party. Next follows a number of planning and preparation activities, frequently involving wedding specialists. Although these are usually thought of as practical, logistical activities, they often take on the characteristics of ritual in that they consist of traditional activities. These include the selection of a wedding dress, costuming the wedding party, selecting and mailing invitations, signing up with a gift registry, attending wedding showers, the rehearsal, and the rehearsal dinner. The final event in the separation phase is when the bride walks down the aisle and bids farewell to her parents and, in some ceremonies, is formally "given away" by her father and/or mother or other close relative.

The second step is the **transition** phase. During the transition phase, several activities take place that bring about the change in status. In the American wedding, this phase, which is the actual ceremony, lasts from only a few minutes to over an hour. This is relatively short when compared with rites of passage found in other societies, in which the transition phase can last months or even years.

At the conclusion of the transition phase, the person conducting the American wedding ceremony often will introduce the newly married couple to the congregation as "Mr. and Mrs." Thus begins the final phase, **incorporation**, during which the couple reenters normal society, though in a new social relationship. This stage includes the reception or party celebrating the marriage. The incorporation phase usually lasts several hours, although in many groups it is considerably longer. After the reception there is often a series of additional activities, such as a display of gifts and the writing of thank-you notes.

All of this can be quite daunting and very expensive. Of course, in our society a couple can fly to Las Vegas or go to the local courthouse and get the piece of paper and skip most of the traditional activities. However, many couples and their families are very uncomfortable with this and will follow such a legal wedding with some type of celebration to reaffirm the marriage, such as a reception or perhaps a second wedding ceremony attended by friends and family.

COMING-OF-AGE RITUALS. A ritual that frequently assumes great importance in traditional societies is the coming-of-age ritual, which marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. An example is the rite of passage that accompanies **menarche**, or a girl's first menstruation. Menarche is only one physiological event within a complex cycle of events we call puberty that extends over several years. However, menarche is a very definite, easily observed event.

Because puberty is so well marked in females, the ritual is sometimes an individual ritual rather than for a group of girls at one time. The announcement of first menstruation by a girl to her mother may initiate the separation phase. Among the Yanomamö of South America, a girl

who is menstruating for the first time is secluded in a simple enclosure built in the corner of her dwelling. The transition period lasts three days, during which the girl sits on the floor eating little. She shaves her head and removes her ornaments in an effort to look as unattractive as possible. This is done to prevent evil spirits from seducing the girl and taking her away to be married, leaving behind her dead body. At the end of this period she is incorporated into the community. She cleans herself and puts on a new apron and ornaments. She is now considered to be an adult female member of the community.

Female coming-of-age rituals may also occur as a group ritual. In this case the ritual usually occurs several years before the onset of puberty to ensure that the ritual is completed before the onset of menstruation.

Initiation rituals for boys are often more elaborate than those for girls. Because boys lack a clearly defined physiological event to mark the onset of puberty, the timing of male initiation is fairly arbitrary. Male initiation rituals are usually group rituals in which all of the boys of a certain age range in a community are periodically rounded up to go through the ritual as a group.

Male initiation ceremonies are usually characterized by relatively short separation and incorporation phases. The separation phase may be very sudden, as when masked dancers tear the boys away from their families without warning. The incorporation phase may simply be a reintroduction of the boys, now occupying their new status as men, to the community, followed by feasting.

TRANSITION AND LIMINALITY. Initiates in the transition stage, especially in those rituals in which this stage lasts for a significant period of time, are in an out-of-the-ordinary situation. They have shed their previous identification and place in society but have yet to take on the mantle of their new status. Their ambiguous position and the fact that they are marginal to their society—often in a real sense if they are removed to a special camp away from the village—are represented symbolically.

An often-encountered metaphor for a rite of passage is the cycle of death and rebirth. Separation is symbolized by death, and incorporation by rebirth. The period of time between death and rebirth is a time of mystery during which the initiate undergoes a metamorphosis from one kind of human being to another. Just as the process of change within an insect's cocoon is hidden from view and therefore mysterious, the activities surrounding the transitional phase may be hidden from view from women and uninitiated boys.

Initiates within this transition period are said to be in a liminal state. **Liminality** is the state of ambiguous marginality during which the metamorphosis takes place. As such, it is symbolically represented by a number of attributes. Victor Turner provides us with a list of features that characterize the liminal state. The first column in Table 4.3 lists some of the properties of liminality, which are contrasted in the second column with the normal state.

An important feature of the state of liminality is summed up by the term ***communitas***. Within this state not only is there a sense of equality, but the mere fact that a group of individuals is moving through the process together brings about a sense of community and camaraderie. This is what occurs in the Islamic *hajj*, in which all pilgrims wear the same white garments and perform the same rituals regardless of wealth or social standing. The sense of belonging transcends the tremendous ethnic diversity of the pilgrims who gather together from all over the world.

In many traditional societies the boys who are initiated together form very close bonds and will usually remain close friends throughout their lives. In some African societies this group of males will form a formal group known as an **age set.** Age sets cut across other group boundaries, such as

TABLE 4.3 Characteristics of Liminality

Liminality	Normal State
Transition	State
Communitas	Structure
Equality	Inequality
Anonymity	Systems of nomenclature
Absence of property	Property
Absence of status	Status
Nakedness or uniform clothing	Distinctions of clothing
Sexual continence	Sexuality
Absence of rank	Distinctions of rank
Humility	Just pride of position
Disregard for personal appearance	Care for personal appearance
Unselfishness	Selfishness
Total obedience	Obedience only to superior rank
	Secularity

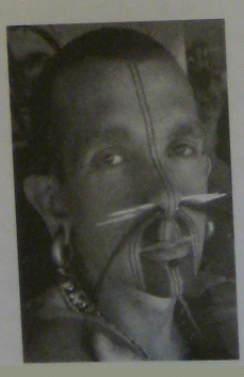
Being able to have one's body cut, pierced, tattooed, and scarred without showing pain is often a critical element in rites of passage. The experience and acceptance of pain is an important feature of liminality, and this pain may play a role in developing an altered state of consciousness (Chapter 5), an important aspect of a ritual experience.

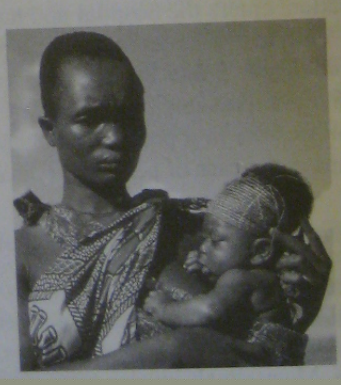
TATTOOING AND OTHER PERMANENT ALTERATIONS. The history of tattooing in American and European cultures can be traced to the voyages of James Cook in the eighteenth century. Many of Cook's sailors were tattooed during their stay in Tahiti, and the word *tattoo* is derived from the Tahitian word *ta-tu*, meaning "to mark or strike." Tattooing involves piercing or cutting the skin and then introducing a pigment into the wound. In contemporary Western societies this is done with an electronic device, but the principle is the same (Figure 4.2a).

The social implications of tattooing in Western society have varied. At times it has been a fad among the aristocracy or members of particular social groups, such as sailors, gangs, and prisoners. In this context a tattoo served as a mark of social identity. At other times tattooing has been a way to express dissatisfaction with the social order and was a way to distance oneself from the mainstream society. Tattoos also serve a religious purpose when one places a religious symbol or a memorial to a loved one permanently on their skin.

Closely related to tattooing is **cicatrization** or scarification. This is frequently seen in peoples with dark skin on whom tattoos would not show well. In scarification, a piece of skin is raised and cut, and some material, such as ash, is rubbed in to encourage the production of scars. Closely related to cicatrization is branding, in which the scars are created by burns.

Another common alteration of the body involves piercing some body part (Figure 4.2b). Many American women, and some men, bore holes into their earlobes to hang earrings. The hole may be enlarged so that a plug can be inserted, or weights may be attached so that the earlobe will be stretched. A few societies pierce the lower lip and insert a round plate. People may also pierce their nose, eyebrow, lips, tongue, nipples, and even genitals. A society matron might pierce her ears to wear fashionable diamond earrings; her rebellious child might pierce his nose or eyebrow as a symbolic act of rebellion; a youth from the Amazon may have his ears pierced as part of a coming-of-age ritual.





BOX 4.1

The Hajj

One of the Five Pillars of Islam, which form the framework of Muslim life, is the *hajj*, or the pilgrimage to Mecca. All Muslims who are able to do so are expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. The *hajj* begins on the eighth day of *Dhul-Hijjah* (month for Hajj), the twelfth month of the Islamic year, and lasts for as long as six days. Every year, more than two million pilgrims from all over the world go to Mecca during this month. The *hajj* includes a series of rituals and symbols that are intended to bring the pilgrim as close as possible to God. A common act during the *hajj* is a constant repetition of the *Shahadah*, or statement of belief. This creed states that "*La ilaha ill-Allah Muhammad-un Rasulu-llah*" ("There is no God but Allah, and Mohammad is the Messenger of God").

Although there is some variation, what follows is a basic description of the sequence of events that make up the *hajj*. Before entering Mecca, the pilgrims stop at designated places outside the city to conduct cleansing rituals. As part of this cleansing, men cut their nails, trim their beards, and put on a white seamless garment. (Women also wear white, but no particular dress is prescribed.) By wearing this special clothing, all pilgrims become alike, symbolic of the Islamic belief that all Muslims are equal before God regardless of social status or wealth. This garment is also like a burial shroud, which symbolizes dying or turning away from earthly life to devote all attention to God.

The pilgrims then move into the Great Mosque, which can hold up to 500,000 pilgrims at a time. Here the pilgrims walk around the Kaaba seven times. The Kaaba is a black stone that stands fifteen meters high, engraved with the sacred names of Allah. It was already a sacred object in Mecca before the time of Mohammad. The Qur'an says that Abraham and Ishmael together built the Kaaba, and it is also thought to be the site of Adam's original place of worship.

The pilgrims then travel to the plain of Mina, three miles from Mecca. According to the Qur'an, Mina and other sites such as Arafat are places where the word of God was revealed through Mohammad. After going to Mina, the pilgrims move on to the Arafat Valley, where Muslims believe Mohammad delivered his last sermon. The pilgrims gather stones and return to Mina. The stones are thrown at the *Jamraat,* three pillars that represent places where Satan tried to tempt Abraham from following the path of Allah. This act is symbolic of Abraham throwing stones at Satan when he tried to dissuade Abraham from sacrificing his son. Also related to this event is the ritual sacrifice of a sheep. This is seen as a reminder of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son, even though God's mercy allowed the substitution of a ram. The meat is distributed to family, friends, and the needy. Finally, the pilgrims return to the Great Mosque to again circle the Kaaba.

After completion of the rituals the pilgrims reenter normal life. They cut their hair, feast, and [illegible] sexual intercourse. On returning home, they often wear special clothing, are given

During the dry season, between October and February, small groups of pilgrims, each led by a shaman, leave their villages to travel to Wirikuta. Many objects are collected and prepared for the journey, including candles, small yarn paintings, coins, and special arrows. Each pilgrim assumes the role of one of the Ancient Ones. This is more than play acting, for they become the gods they represent. The shaman leading the pilgrimage becomes Grandfather Fire.

As the Huichol pilgrims journey on foot (or today partly by bus or truck), they visit a number of sacred sites, such as water holes and caves. At each of these places the story of the journey of the Ancient Ones and their visit to the sacred place is told. Offerings are made, and prayers are recited, as social rites of intensification are performed.

Finally, they reach the sacred land, where they find the peyote cactus, the "footprint of the deer." After being ritually "killed" and after offerings have been made, the cactus is collected and eaten. Peyote contains a hallucinogen. The Huichol believe that by eating the peyote, they see what the gods see. (The use of hallucinogens in religious rituals is discussed in Chapter 5.)

RELIGIOUS OBLIGATIONS

There are a number of simple religious ritual acts that are usually performed by an individual or a small group such as a family. A Christian says grace before eating a meal. A Jew entering a building kisses the mezuzah, a small case attached to the door frame in which lies a parchment with verses from the Torah. A Buddhist lights a candle in a household shrine.

There are other ceremonial obligations that might not involve obvious ritual activity but do entail a series of obligations and avoidances of particular objects, foods, and activities that are found in daily life. For example, virtually all cultures have certain foods that are served only on ceremonial occasions. Other foods may be forbidden to all members of the community or certain members of the society at particular points in time.

Tabu

In a society some objects and people may be off limits and are said to be **tabu**. The term *tabu* also refers to inappropriate modes of interpersonal behaviors. These are often phrased in terms of pollution. It would bring dishonor, bad luck, or some other negative result for a person to have contact with someone or something that is tabu.

Things that are sacred can be thought of as possessing supernatural power and are therefore off limits to most individuals. Contact with the supernatural can be dangerous. Priests must perform rituals to safeguard themselves and the community against this danger. This is not malicious power. It is neutral, like electricity. If you stick a wet finger into an electric socket, you will receive a large jolt of electricity, and perhaps you will die. The electricity is not evil, but it is powerful. When properly harnessed, it can be used to light our homes, run machinery, and so forth.

One of the most sacred objects in the Torah is the ark that carried the stone tablets from Mount Sinai to Jerusalem to be installed in the Temple. The journey of the ark to Jerusalem was not a simple one, and many of the episodes that occurred on this journey illustrate how dangerous the ark was. Not only was the ark a sacred object, but also God had declared that only Aaron and his descendants were allowed to touch it. On one occasion, as the ark approached the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen that were pulling the cart that carried the ark stumbled. One of the followers, Uzzah, reached out to steady the ark. After all, it would have been a sacrilege to let the ark fall to the ground. Yet we are told that Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark, "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he

died by the ark of God" (2 Samuel 6:7). In other words, Uzzah's death was not the result of some evil activity. In fact his steadying of the ark was a good thing; but his contact with such a holy object, in the absence of ritual, resulted in his death.

The response to breaking a tabu is thought to be automatic rather than being at the decision of a deity. Sometimes nothing can be done to save the individual who has broken the tabu, but often there are ritual means of mending the situation.

MANA AND TABU IN POLYNESIA. The concept of tabu in Polynesia can be seen in the etiquette surrounding the chief. Again, this relates to the idea of things that possess supernatural power being seen as dangerous and often best avoided. In Polynesia this supernatural power is described by the term **mana**. Mana is an impersonal supernatural force that is found concentrated in special places in the landscape, in particular objects, and in certain people.

In some cases it is possible for an individual to gain or manipulate mana, thus tapping into a source of supernatural power that then can be used for some purpose. Frequently, mana is granted to a person by a supernatural being. In Polynesia mana comes from the gods. The chief, as a direct descendant of the gods, has the most mana, followed by his relatives and so on down through the hierarchy. Mana does flow from one thing to another, but it is part of the chief's role to be a reservoir and conductor of mana.

However, because of the chief's great amount of mana, he constitutes an involuntary menace to those around him, who have a lesser capacity for mana. Thus many tabus are in place to protect others from this power. Not only is it tabu to touch the chief himself, but because the chief's mana also runs into everything he uses, it also is dangerous to use his furniture or even use his fire to cook with. In some places the chief was even carried around on a litter because if he walked on a path with his own feet, the path became forever dangerous, or tabu, to commoners.

Jewish Food Laws

Many cultures have complex systems of food prohibitions. These prohibitions may apply to the entire community, or they may apply only to individuals of a particular age, gender, or social position.

Kashrut is the Jewish law regarding what foods can and cannot be eaten and how foods must be prepared. *Kashrut* comes from the Hebrew root *Kaf-Shin-Resh,* meaning fit, proper, or correct. The more commonly known word *kosher* comes from the same root. Kosher foods are those that are proper according to the *Kashrut.* Food that is not kosher is referred to as *treyf.* Although some have tried to analyze these rules in terms of early health regulations, Jews who observe these dietary laws do so because the Torah says to do so. No other reason is necessary. (Rules similar to the Jewish dietary laws are also found in Islam, in which permitted foods are *halal* and prohibited foods are *haram.*)

The rules for keeping kosher include eating only land mammals that have cloven hoofs and chew their cud. ("Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat" [Leviticus 11:3].) This is why eating pork is not allowed.

Even animals that are allowed to be eaten must be slaughtered ritually. This ritual slaughter is known as *shechitah* and is performed by a ritual specialist, a *shochet.* The ritual slaughter is done by a quick, deep stroke across the animal's throat with a perfectly sharp blade. This method is seen as being the most humane method of slaughter possible. It ensures a rapid and complete draining of the blood as well, which is also a kosher rule. The prohibition of the consumption of blood is the only dietary law that has a reason given in the Torah: The life of the animal is

contained in the blood. ("Moreover ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or beast, in any of your dwellings. Whatsoever soul it be that eateth any manner of blood, even that soul shall be cut off from his people" [Leviticus 7:26–27].)

Many of these obligations serve to provide a social identity to a group and to clearly separate that community from its neighbors. They also serve to separate different subgroups from one another in a multicultural society. For example, members of a particular group might wear special clothing that marks them as members of that group, such as a wearing a turban or other head covering, or might alter the appearance of their body, such as growing a beard. Particular behaviors and food prohibitions also serve as symbols of group identity and as barriers to social interactions between different social units. If you cannot eat with someone, it becomes difficult to engage in close social interactions. Such prohibitions play important roles in defining religious groups and keeping them intact.

BOX 4.2

Menstrual Tabus

One common category of tabus found cross-culturally is menstrual tabus. Common rules include spending time in menstrual huts, refraining from cooking or eating certain foods, restricting contact with males (especially in regards to sex), and bathing in special locations and/or times. Many of these tabus separate women from men and are seen as protecting men from possible pollution.

The Mehinaku, an Amazonian group, tell the following myth about the origins of menstruation.[a]

> A long time ago the Sun (Kama) wanted to have sex with Spirit Woman (Apapainyeineju). Oh, but her labia were long. The Sun took her by the wrist and said, "Let's have sex!" To which she replied, "Ah, not me. My vagina is very dangerous and frightening. Inside there is stinging ant, Mein. Inside there are snakes, such as Mekhe and others. Inside is Scorpion, Yucapanu. If it gets you, then you will really be sick. There are many of these between my labia too. I am really dangerous and frightening."
>
> The Sun went into the forest and returned with fish poison and dredged it into Spirit Woman's vagina, just as he would have done into a pool. Out floated all of the dangerous animals. Out came the snakes, then the spiders, and the scorpion. All of these came out but one tiny piranha that remained lodged deep inside her.
>
> "This is good," said the Sun, and he gave tiny piranha to all the women. Each month the piranha bite the women and make them bleed. Sometimes, the woman can feel the piranha bite, and tell their husbands, "Soon I am going to have my period."

As seen in the myth, for the Mehinaku, female genitalia is seen as a source of danger and possible injury. This remains true beyond mythic times as menstruating women are seen as contaminating food which can cause an illness with chest pains and a cough. Although this illness is not serious for women, it is for men and can even cause death.

Menstrual tabus are found in the world religions as well. In Judaism, menstrual blood is considered ritually unclean. Leviticus 18:19 states, "You shall not approach a woman in her time of unclean separation, to uncover her nakedness" and women are forbidden from making any physical contact with men during menstruation and for the week following. At the end of this time, the woman immerses herself in a mikvah, a ritual bath.

Restrictions for Muslim women are for religious functions only and are based on the Qur'an 2:22 which states, "They question thee (O Muhammad) concerning menstruation. Say it is an illness so let women alone at such times and go not into them until they are cleansed. And when they have purified themselves, then go unto them as Allah hath enjoined upon you." A menstruating woman may not enter a shrine or mosque, and may not pray, fast, or touch or recite from the Qur'an. She must refrain from sex and complete a ritual washing before she is considered clean again.

Specific rules about menstruation are not common in Christian denominations, but a history of menstrual tabus has been a major factor in discussions about having women in positions of authority in Christianity and some, such as the Orthodox Church, do not allow menstruating women to receive communion.

Amazonian People (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987),

tool. . . . It is ritual which accomplishes what religion sets out to do.

6. Many religions mandate specific ritual obligations. How do these obligations function in society? How do they influence interpersonal relationships between members of different religious groups?
7. If you have a chance, observe individuals from a particular religious group. Describe differences in dress and other behaviors. Would you label these ritual obligations?

Endnotes

1. A. F. C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York: Random House, 1966).
2. From "*The Sacred Hunt,*" by David F. Pelly, published in 2001 by Greystone Books, an imprint of D&M Publishers, Inc. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.
3. Ibid., p. 28.
4. H. Basedow, *The Australian Aboriginal* (Adelaide, Australia: Preece, 1925).
5. A. F. C. Wallace, op. cit., p. 102.

CHAPTER

5

Altered States of Consciousness

TABLE 5.2 Factors Bringing about an Altered State of Consciousness

Production of Altered State of Consciousness	Examples
Reduction of external stimulation and/or motor activity; constant exposure to repetitive stimulation	Solitary confinement, prolonged social and stimulus deprivation, altered states while falling asleep or waking up, dreaming
Increase of external stimulation (sensory overload) and/or strenuous physical activity	Third degree tactics, spirit possession states, ecstatic trance

FIGURE 5.1 ***Mayan Carving.*** Stone carvings from Temple 23, Yaxchilán, Mexico, commemorating a ritual performed on October 28, 709 C.E., celebrating the birth of Bird-Jaguar. (a) Lintel 24 shows Lady Xoc pulling a rope studded with thorns through her tongue as her husband, Shield-Jaguar, holds a torch. (b) Lintel 25 shows Lady Xoc experiencing a hallucination of a serpent.

transformative. In these cases pain is often experienced as the catalyst for strengthening the person's sense of self. Instead of being isolating, the pain experience may reinforce the person's connections to both the social and supernatural worlds. Prime examples of changes in identity that occur through pain experiences are possession and exorcism, both of which will be discussed in later chapters.

A pilgrimage (see Chapter 4) often involves sacred pain that may be interpreted as a sacrifice, an imitation of the suffering of a god, a penance, a test, and so on. Again, such pain is related to an altered state of consciousness. One example comes from the pilgrimage to Sabari Malai in South India. The pilgrimage follows the path of the god Lord Ayyappan, son of Shiva, and his encounter with, and defeat of, a female demon. Pilgrims commit themselves to celibacy, moderate eating, walking with bare feet, and sleeping on the ground. The pilgrimage is a forty-

is able to distinguish between the pain caused by blisters, wherever they happen to be, and the pain arising from strained calf muscles and tendons.... The headaches caused by the heat of the noon sun and the load of the *iru muti* can be distinguished from the pain resulting from the straps of the knapsack biting into one's shoulders.

Sooner or later, however, all the different kinds of pain begin to merge.... The experience of pain makes one acutely aware of oneself (ego) as the victim, and the outside (undifferentiated as roots, stones, and hot sand) as the pain-causing agent.... With time, pain stops having a causative agent, and ego is obscured or snuffed out because it has nothing to contrast itself with or stand against.... There is a "feeling" of pain, of course, but it is a sensation that has no agent, no tense, and no comparative.... Pain is the only sensation belonging to the eternal present.

The Biological Basis of Altered States of Consciousness

...spirit or visited by an angel; they

BOX 5.1

Altered States in Upper Paleolithic Art

The Upper Paleolithic of Europe (35,000–10,000 years ago) is the time when the first *Homo sapiens* arrived and replaced the Neandertals. It was a time of new technologies and the development of artistic traditions. Perhaps the most famous art from this era is that of cave paintings, which are found primarily in France and Spain.

Over the decades, archaeologists and art historians have wrestled with interpreting the meaning of cave art and the role it played for people of the Upper Paleolithic. David Lewis-Williams believes that the art was part of a religious experience and are graphic representations of experiences of altered states of consciousness, either created while in or immediately after coming out of an altered state.

Lewis-Williams points out that when people enter altered states there are some experiences that appear to be universal, because they result from the biology of the brain. One is the sensation of flying. Another is that of being drawn into a vortex, which is often perceived as the entrance to a tunnel that leads to another world such as an underworld. He theorizes that Upper Paleolithic peoples saw the caves in terms of such experiences. They were the "entrails of the underworld." The walls of the caves were seen as a membrane between the everyday world and the world of the spirits.

Many of the works found on the cave walls incorporate some feature of the wall itself, such as a crack or nodule. Often the painted animals appear to be coming out of the wall. These are spirit-animals, and shamans performed rituals to move these animals through the membrane so the shaman could use the spirit-animal in healing and other activities. This connection to the spirit world on the other side of the membrane can be seen in offerings—such as stone objects and animal teeth—that are wedged into cracks in the wall, thereby sending them into the underworld. Incised lines may also be attempts to penetrate to the other side.

In addition to representational images, such as animals, Upper Paleolithic humans painted geometric figures on the cave walls. In moving into a trance state, a person passes through three stages. In the first stage, geometric visual images are seen. These are **entoptic phenomena** and are the forms painted on the cave walls. These images are seen by peoples in all societies, but they are open to cultural interpretation. In the second phase, the individual attempts to make sense of these phenomena and interprets them in cultural terms. These entoptic images are still seen in the third stage, or deep trance. They combine with iconic images of people and animals that are seen as part of the spirit world. In these deep trances, an individual will often feel changed into an animal and shares the power of the spirit-animal. Images of transformed shamans are called ***therianthropes***.

Sources: D. J. Lewis-Williams and J. Clottes, "The Mind in the Cave—the Cave in the Mind: Altered Consciousness in the Upper Paleolithic," *Anthropology of Consciousness,* 9 (1998), pp. 13–21; D. J. Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002).

softening of the boundaries between self and other. This may be responsible for an altered mental state described by many religious systems in which the divisions between the self and the outside world disappear and one feels as being "one" with the universe or supernatural beings. This is referred to as a **unitary state**.

Other research has focused on the emotional impact of repetitive motor behaviors, including what are referred to as marked actions or actions that are different from normal ordinary movements, such as a slow bow. Other studies have looked at the impact of smell, such as that of burning incense. What is important to note is that these studies have found that it is not possible to get the exact same effects as are seen with ritual behavior just by chemically stimulating the right area. It is only with the merging of beliefs and behaviors that the full effect is achieved.

Drug-Induced Altered States

Drugs can also be used to attain an altered state of consciousness. In Chapter 4 we discussed the pilgrimage of the Huichol of Mexico. The use of peyote is a key element in their religious practices; it is used to contact and interact with supernatural powers in rituals that are an integral part of their pilgrimage. Although peyote is a controlled substance and its possession is illegal in the United States, it is legally used by the Native American Church (Box 5.2) as a sacrament in much the same way as Christians and Jews were able to use sacramental wine during the period of Prohibition. In all of these cases the substance is used to create a religious experience as it is defined by the culture. Table 5.3 lists various categories of drugs that produce an altered state of consciousness.

The use of drugs to induce an altered state of consciousness is practiced by many societies. As with any altered state of consciousness, this can have both adaptive and maladaptive expressions. For example, a drug addict may be unable to maintain a home, a job, or normal social relationships as a consequence of his or her addiction. In discussing drug-induced altered states, it is important to recognize the difference between secular drug use, which is often extremely maladaptive, used for escapism, and leads to many personal and social problems, and ritual drug use, which is highly controlled and generally adaptive.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A RITUAL SETTING. The problems associated with recreational drug use, such as addiction, are generally not seen when the usage is done in a religious context. Religious drug use takes place only at certain times and in certain contexts, with defined beginning and end points. The ritual setting channels the experience in important ways.

TABLE 5.3 Drugs that Produce an Altered State of Consciousness

Category	Examples	Effects
Euphoria	Morphine	Reduces mental activity and induces a sense of well-being
Phantastica	Marijuana, peyote	Causes visions, illusions, hallucinations, delirium
Inebriantia	Alcohol	Produces a state of intoxication; brings about an initial phase of cerebral excitation followed by a state of depression
Hypnotica	Xanax	Sedatives or sleep producers; may cause insensibility to pain
Excitania	Analeptics, coffee, tobacco	Mental stimulants
Tranquilizer	Librium, Thorazine, Valium	Reduces anxiety and mental tension; produces a state of mental calm

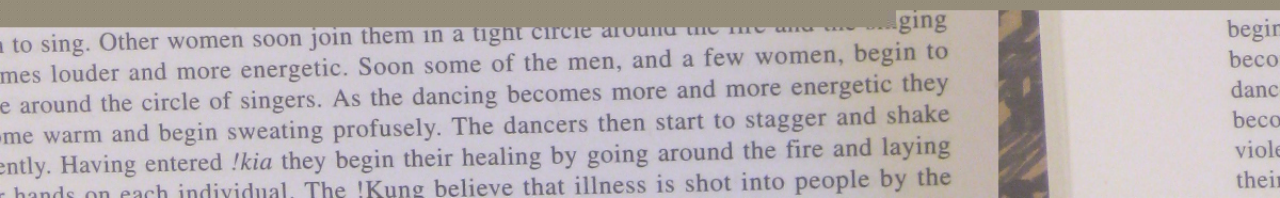
BOX 5.2

The Native American Church

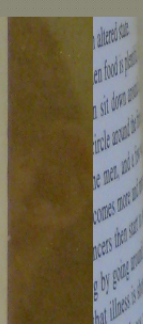
The importance of this structure and the possible dangers of drug use are often recognized the insider's perspective as well. For example, the Huichol emphasize the role of the shaman t just to lead them on the peyote pilgrimage, but also to lead them back. They long for the stasy of this religious experience but also worry they might not be able to return from it.

The Holiness Churches

The Holiness Churches are a series of independent churches that are found primarily in Appalachia, most predominantly in West Virginia. This area of the United States was once highly dependent on coal mining. It was a relatively isolated, economically depressed area. Although some of this is true today, the isolation is breaking down, and life is improving. Many Holiness Churches still survive. Each church is independent, yet individuals will frequently [illegible]. The rituals do not follow a set pattern, although many [illegible]



or the Sun Dance, *oxheheom*, means "New Life Lodge" or "Lodge
s closely tied to the creation of the earth and passages from the
yth tells of a famine that was afflicting the Cheyenne. In response,
(Erect Horns) took the beautiful wife of a tribal chief with him on
ain. Inside the mountain, they were taught the Sun Dance and were
nce the world would be renewed.
d by an individual who is making a commitment to supernatural
made in hopes of healing a loved one, or a man may himself
e dance if he recovers. The vow may be made to avert danger in



the theme of renewal.

The Cheyenne's name fo
of the Generator." The ritual i
Cheyenne origin story. One my
a culture hero named Tomsivsi
a journey to the Sacred Mounta
told that by performing the da

The ceremony is pledge
beings. This pledge may be
may be sick and vow to do th

of rivers, mountains, and forests. To accomplish this, one must take *ebene,* which is a hallucinogenic snuff made of several ingredients. The snuff is blown into the nose of the individual.

Many ethnographies of South American cultures describe the varied ways in which drugs are used among these peoples. Many of these practices are outlined by Johannes Wilbert, who, while focusing on the use of tobacco in South American societies, also touches on the use of other substances. In these societies a drug is often used in combination with a variety of substances, both collected and cultivated.[5]

The use of tobacco, often mixed with other substances, is common in South American societies. The substances are made into several different forms, and many delivery systems have developed. Of course, traditional societies do not have the option of injection, so the problem is how to get the drug into the bloodstream, where it will move rapidly to the brain.

Substances are efficiently absorbed in parts of the body that are lined with epithelial tissue that contain a high density of blood capillaries. These include the lining of lungs, mouth, throat, digestive system, rectum, nose, and eyes. Tobacco can be smoked, sucked (as in chewing tobacco), or drunk. Some tribes produce a processed form of tobacco with the consistency of a jelly, which is then rubbed on the teeth and gums. Tobacco can be dried and ground into a powder and blown up the nose.

Drugs also can be introduced into the rectum by some type of enema device. The advantages of this technique are that it will not irritate the stomach and that the drug will not be lost if the individual vomits. Sometimes the enema device is a simple tube. The drug is then blown into the rectum. Another device makes use of a bulb that can be made from rubber or the bladder of an animal. A painting on a pottery vessel found in a Mayan site solved the mystery of a particular type of pottery vessel that appeared to have no obvious function. The painting shows it being used, with a rubber bulb, as an enema syringe.

CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1 we listed the six dimensions of religion as set forth by Ninian Smart. One of these was the experiential dimension, an encounter with a sacred reality that is beyond ordinary experience. Religious experiences can be highly emotional. They can range from a generalized feeling of well-being to dramatic visions. These mental states, states that differ from one's normal mental states, are altered states of consciousness. They define religious experience. It is through such altered states that supernatural phenomena and powers manifest themselves. It moves abstract beliefs into the realm of lived experience.

Interpreting the changes in mental state when one is in an altered state of consciousness is largely influenced by culture. In other words, culture places meaning on our experiences. A buzz from drinking several alcoholic drinks is amenable to several interpretations. Some are secular: "I've had a little too much to drink, and I'm feeling tipsy." Some people, experiencing the identical reaction, might interpret that same feeling as "I feel as if a spirit has entered my body." The objective feeling may be the same, but the subjective interpretation may be very different.

The religious interpretations of altered states of consciousness generally fall into two categories. First, supernatural power, usually in the form of spirits or gods, enters the person's body, a phenomenon that we call **spirit possession**. An individual can control the spirit within his or her body to accomplish certain goals, or the spirit that possesses a human body can use that body to heal or to divine the unknown, often without the knowledge or the memory of the possessed person. However, possession by an unwanted spirit can bring about illness that may be cured by exorcism rituals.

The second common religious interpretation of an altered state of consciousness is that a person has entered a trance state because the soul has left the person's body. The experience of the individual in the altered state is then associated with the experiences of the soul, which is operating in a supernatural realm.

Altered states frequently play an important role in healing, for both the healer and the patient. Healing is facilitated, and in some cases even accomplished, through suggestibility, emotional catharsis, and feelings of rejuvenation. For example, when possessed by a spirit, the healer may use the supernatural power of the spirit to remove the cause of the illness, often by sucking the offending spirit out of the patient's body. When an illness is diagnosed as the loss of the soul, the healer sends his or her soul on a voyage to retrieve the lost soul of the patient.

The most common idea of religious altered states, though, is the idea of achieving a unitary state, a state in which the individual experiences a feeling of becoming one with the supernatural, however this is conceived of by the community. For some, this is becoming one with God or a spirit; for others, it may be expressed as becoming one with a generalized supernatural force. We saw an example of this in our discussion of the Sabari Malai pilgrimage, the goal of which is a unitary state with the god Lord Ayyappan.

The idea of the unitary state is often one of the major components of a religious ritual or even an entire religious system. A common religious theme is that humans were once at one with the supernatural but somehow became separated. The goal of many religious practices is to regain that unity. This theme can be seen in many familiar religions. For Christians, Jesus provides the pathway back to God; for Buddhists, following the teachings of Buddha allows an individual to attain oneness with the universe; for Muslims, reconciliation is possible through submission of the will to Allah.

The Upper Paleolithic cave site of Chauvet-Pont-D'Arc.

www.nativeamericanchurch.com
The website of the Native American Church of Strawberry Plains, Tennessee.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/aoa/y/maya_royal_blood-letting.aspx
The lintels from the Mayan site of Yaxchilán.

Study Questions

1. Altered states of consciousness include familiar experiences such as dreaming and daydreaming. Describe any such experiences that you have had. How do they fit the description of an altered state of consciousness that is given in this chapter?
2. Many factors can lead to altered states of consciousness and are likely to occur in most people's [illegible]

the experience of pain become a part of the total experience? You might want to talk with some people who have undergone these procedures.
4. Next time you go to a religious service, pay close attention to any experiences that could be labeled an altered state of consciousness. Describe the experience. What were the conditions that led to the experience? How do the physical layout of the [illegible] the presence of ritual

CHAPTER

6

There are many terms used to describe religious specialists. Unfortunately, the terms are

SHAMANS

The distinction between priests and **shamans** is not always clear-cut, and there are many religious specialists who fall somewhere in between. Generally speaking, in contrast to a priest, a shaman [illegible] his or her power directly from the spirit world. He or she acquires status and abilities, [illegible] during shamanic trances

the use of a specific culturally recognized and transmitted method and paraphernalia, and a socially recognized special position for the shaman.

world in order to achieve some specified end. The candidate establishes a relationship with a spirit familiar who acts as his guide to the supernatural world. The period of apprenticeship may include periods of seclusion, fasting, and the taking of hallucinogens, but the main goal is to learn to enter into and control the experience of an altered state of consciousness.

THE SHAMANIC ROLE AND RITUALS. The shaman may contact the supernatural by traditional, standardized methods that fit our definition of ritual. The ritual is only a means for contacting and establishing a relationship with a supernatural entity; it is not an end in itself. The success of a

However, no matter what the reason, the novice must have the aptitude and ability to learn the required elements of priestly duties. Although a priest may connect with the supernatural through visions and trances, this ability is not as important as the priest's ability to memorize and

FIGURE 6.2 ***Okinawan Priestess.*** Priestesses perform during a ceremony honoring victims of the 1945 bombing of Nagasaki.

Kaminchu rituals are funded by the village council or clan and take place at the village prayer house in the village square, in clan houses, or in sacred groves. On these occasions the priestesses wear elaborate five-piece white outfits and a crown of leaves. This is the conventional clothing for the *kami* as well. The significance of the *kaminchu* is in their presence; they actually do very little at a ritual. They sit in certain places on certain days and receive food offerings from the villagers. They do not preach, perform rites of passage, or heal—they sit and eat. However, like the *kami* themselves, they are believed to emit good spiritual energy. The villagers also like to have the *kaminchu* around at events such as housewarmings and agricultural festivals.

The role of *kaminchu* is semihereditary. Each clan has a certain number of *kaminchu* positions that can only be filled by female members of the clan. Within some clans, certain positions can only be filled by women of certain families. The role of chief *kaminchu* for a village is traditionally passed from mother to daughter.

Susan Sered compared the stories told by *kaminchu* (priestesses) and *yuta* (shamans) of how they attained their positions.[5] Both types of religious practitioners told of illnesses, but Sered found significant differences between the two. The *kaminchu* reported minor illnesses that generally involved some sort of bleeding or other bodily rupture. The Okinawan worldview sees the body as whole and sealed and this illness event was seen as opening the path for the embodiment of the *kami*. However, the illness is small and symbolic. It does not make the women into a *kaminchu* but is considered a sign or reminder of what she was born to be.

In contrast, the illnesses reported by the *yuta* involved serious psychological, physical, or social dysfunction. After a long illness that made them social outcasts, they were able to heal themselves both physically and socially through becoming *yuta*. Overcoming the illness was

seling, but the focus of their respon
involved with the performance of social rites of intensification that center around the Divine Liturgy or communion service. The priest also performs rites of passage associated with birth, baptism, marriage and death. This knowledge and authority comes from the church.

OTHER SPECIALISTS

While shamans and priests are major and well-studied types of religious specialists, many other specialists practice in various limited ways. The labels that are used to refer to these specialists often overlap extensively and are not used in any consistent manner. Some of their functions overlap those of shamans and priests. In this section we will look at healers, herbalists, diviners, and prophets.

Healers and Diviners

The term *healer* is often used to refer to a priest or shaman, especially when the individual is

Diviners usually focus on very practical questions: What is a good time to plant my crop? Will my investment pay off? Whom should I marry? What is an auspicious day for a marriage? A very important type of information that diviners provide is the cause of illness. The diviner often provides the diagnosis, and the healer provides the cure. Diviners usually, but not always, work for private clients and are paid for their services. Divination is discussed in Chapter 7.

Prophets

A **prophet** is a mouthpiece of the gods. It is the role of a prophet to communicate the words and will of the gods to his or her community and to act as an intermediary between the gods and the people. Although shamans may occasionally function as prophets, in many cases the role of prophet is a separate one. Prophets are found in a wide variety of cultures and include the familiar examples of Moses and Mohammad.

Handsome Lake was a prophet of the Seneca tribe (Eastern Woodlands culture area) during the time when the reservation system was first imposed. In 1799 Handsome Lake became ill and appeared to have died. His body was prepared for burial, but he revived. He said that he had had a vision of three messengers who had revealed to him God's will and told him that he was to carry this message back to his people. Later the same year he received a second revelation in which he was shown heaven and hell and was given moral instructions, which were very similar to Christian ideas. Handsome Lake received further revelations in subsequent years. On the basis of his visions, he preached a revitalization of traditional seasonal ceremonies, strengthening the family, and a prohibition against alcohol. Handsome Lake's teachings continued to spread after his death in 1815 and ultimately became the foundation for the Longhouse religion.

The Nuer, a cattle-herding people living in the Eastern Sudan culture area, have a history of prophets. One example is Ngundeng, a nineteenth-century Nuer prophet. He was born in the late 1830s. Of course, there are no historical records of his life, but there are many stories, espe-

Summary

Most religious systems identify specialists to carry out specific religious functions. Two of the most frequently found specialists are shamans and priests.

A shaman receives his or her power directly from the spirit world and acquires the ability to do sacred things through personal communication with the supernatural. Shamans are part-time independent contractors whose authority lies in their charisma and ability to heal. A Siberian shaman works with a spirit familiar or animal soul that helps the shaman in his or her work of dispelling a disease-causing spirit or retrieving a lost soul.

Priests are full-time religious specialists who are associated with formalized religious institutions and tend to be found in more complex food-producing societies. The priest acts as a representative of the community to the deity or deities and is responsible for the performance of prescribed rituals. The skill of a priest is based on the learning of ritual knowledge and sacred narratives and on knowledge of how to perform these rituals for the benefit of the community. Priestly rituals usually take place in a space that is set aside for ceremonial activities, such as a temple or shrine.

Other kinds of religious specialists include herbalists, diviners, and prophets. A prophet is a mouthpiece of the gods. It is the role of the prophet to communicate the words and will of the gods to his or her community and act as an intermediary between the people and the gods.

Suggested Readings

Nicholas Black Elk (as told through John G. Neihardt), *Black Elk Speaks* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).
[The story of a Lakota shaman living during the years of white settlement at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.]

Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey: A Memoir of Early Days* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982).
[Autobiography of Buechner's childhood, finding Christ, and becoming a minister.]

Thomas Merton, *The Seven Story Mountain: Fiftieth-Anniversary Edition* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998).
[Merton discusses his early doubts, his conversion to Catholicism, and his decision to take life vows as a Trappist monk.]

John K. Nelson, *A Year in the Life of a Shinto Shrine* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996).
[Includes description of the role of Shinto priests and the story of how several men became priests.]

Fiction

Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1990).
[The account of an anthropologist learning the ways of a shaman. Presented as fact but believed to be fictional.]

Suggested Websites

www.shamanism.org
The Foundation for Shamanic Studies (Michael Harner).

www.castaneda.com
Carlos Castaneda's Magical Passes.

www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/index.html
Arctic Studies Center (Smithsonian).

Study Questions

1. Religious specialists in U.S. society are often set apart by particular modes of dress, grooming, and general behavior. Some specialists are subject to special rules, such as celibacy in Catholicism. What is the function of setting religious specialists apart from other members of the community? How does this help the individual in his or her function as a religious specialist?
2. Although most religious specialists in U.S. society are priests, some do, on occasion, carry out functions that are more apt to be classified as shamanism. What are some of these?
3. In cases of illness, most Westerners visit a physician rather than a religious specialist. In what ways does the behavior of a physician resemble that of a religious specialist?
4. How is neoshamanism different from classic shamanism? Do you think the term *shaman* is appropriate to use in Western societies?
5. Although we talk about shamans and priests typically appearing in different kinds of societies, there are cases such as Korea and Okinawa in which both types of practitioners are present. How does this work? How do their roles and functions both overlap and differ?

Endnotes

1. T. Yamada, "Through Dialogue with Contemporary Yakut Shamans: How They Revive Their Worldview," *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 7 (1996), pp. 4–5.
2. M. M. Balzar, "Healing Failed Faith? Contemporary Siberian Shamanism," *Anthropology and Humanism*, 26 (2002), pp. 134–149.
3. Y. K. Harvey, *Six Korean Women: The Socialization of Shamans*, American Ethnological Society Monograph No. 65 (1979), pp. 31–32.
4. M. Harner, The Foundation for Shamanic Studies, www.shamanism.org.

The Function of Magic

When Malinowski studied the Trobriand Islanders (discussed later in this chapter), he noted that they did not use magic in lagoon fishing because it is not dangerous. However, open-sea fishing is dangerous and is accompanied by extensive rituals designed to assure safety and success. He writes: "We do not find magic wherever the pursuit is certain, reliable, and well under the control of rational methods and technological processes. Further, we find magic where the element of danger is conspicuous."[8]

However, Annette Weiner notes that although lagoon fishing is relatively safe, there are other reasons to perform magic in the lagoon environment. She writes: "They 'turn' to magic, not out of psychological distress over a physical environment out of control, but when it is essential that they produce a large catch that must be used for an important exchange that has social and political consequences. To control the actions of the wind and the fish is ultimately proof of one's ability to control an exchange, thereby providing a measure of control over others."[9]

A similar connection between magic and uncertainty can be found in athletics. Of course, skill and practice play a major role in athletic prowess, but poor athletes sometimes do exceptionally well, whereas great athletics will hit a patch of "bad luck." Because much is riding on performance, athletes frequently attempt to control "luck" through magical behavior.

Anthropologist and former professional baseball player George Gmelch describes magical behavior among athletes.[10]

> On each pitching day for the first three months of a winning season, Dennis Grossini, a pitcher on the Detroit Tiger farm team, arose from bed at exactly 10:00 A.M. At 1:00 P.M. he went to the nearest restaurant for two glasses of ice tea and a tuna fish sandwich. Although the afternoon was free, he changed into the sweatshirt and supporter he wore during his last winning game, and one hour before the game he chewed a wad of Beech-Nut chewing tobacco. After each pitch during the game he touched the letters on his uniform and straightened his cap after each ball. Before the start of each inning he replaced the pitcher's rosin bag next to the spot where it was the inning before. And after every inning in which he gave up a run, he washed his hands.
>
> When asked which part of the ritual was most important, he said, "You can't really tell what's most important so it all becomes important. I'd be afraid to change anything. As long as I'm winning, I do everything the same."

Where do these ritual behaviors come from? They come from what appears to be an association between an activity and a result. Most people do not believe in coincidence. The juxtaposition of a behavior with a desired result—the eating of a tuna sandwich before a game in which the pitcher pitches a perfect game, for example—is seen in terms of one causing the other. The pitcher will from that point on religiously eat a tuna sandwich before each game as a method of ensuring success. Gmelch notes that such rituals are found most frequently in those areas that are most difficult to control and are therefore most influenced by random fluctuations of success, such as pitching. This behavior among baseball players closely resembles the behavior of Trobriand Islanders engaging in fishing or trading voyages on the open ocean.

Why Magic Works

Not all magic is directed or purposeful. It is possible to set something in motion without being aware of it, without deliberately performing a ritual. For example, if you break a mirror, you set in motion events that will result in bad luck. This is why many people are careful not to step on

a crack in the sidewalk and not to let a black cat cross their paths. You have not offended a deity who is extracting punishment. You have unwittingly pressed the wrong button and the result—bad luck—will automatically happen.

This perceived relationship between doing something and what appears to be a result of that action is the basis of much behavior in all societies, including our own. I find a coin on the sidewalk that I place in my pocket. The next day something good happens—I unexpectedly receive a raise. In the world of logic and science the juxtaposition of two events does not necessarily imply causality. It does not suggest that the presence of the coin in my pocket is responsible for my good fortune. It is most likely simply coincidence and nothing more.

However, the human mind frequently sees coincidence as evidence of causation. A student wears a particular shirt to a final exam and earns a grade of A in spite of not having had enough time to study. Although doing well can be attributed to hard work, there is always an element of uncertainty. A student might study hard for an exam yet find a question on material that, for some reason, was not studied very extensively—bad luck. Or the question might just happen to be exactly on the material that was well prepared—good luck. When good luck happens, it is often attributed to some outside entity, such as a piece of clothing or object that was being worn or carried that day, or perhaps to the fact that the student behaved in a particular way before the exam—drinking a particular beverage in a particular location, for example.

Tylor addressed the question of why people believe that magic works. The answer is because magic appears never to fail. There are several reasons for this. First, magic often attempts to bring about events that will occur naturally. Rain magic works because it will eventually rain. Rain magic often is performed at the end of the dry season, when rain is badly needed. Of course, the onset of rains normally follows the end of the dry season. However, the practitioners of such magic do not see it that way. The rain comes not naturally, but as a result of the ritual. The proof is very simple: You perform the ritual, and it rains. We could perform an experiment and try to convince a community not to perform rain magic to see what would happen, but to people who depend on their crops for survival this would be a very foolish thing to do. In addition, humans are very resistant to changing their beliefs, even when presented with evidence to the contrary.

This observation is important in understanding the use of magic and other healing rituals in curing illness. In our society over 90 percent of all illnesses, including colds and fevers, will eventually disappear, with or without treatment. Therefore in the vast majority of illnesses a cure will naturally follow the ritual. Again we have to assess the juxtaposition of the ritual and the end of the illness—a case of cause and effect.

People do not generally ask impossible things of magic. Magic to bring rain at the end of the dry season or to make a garden grow is likely to work. Magic to enable a student to pass an exam without studying or to be able to fly off the roof of a building is likely to fail. No one tries to grow his or her garden by magic alone. There is a natural world that demands a natural response (you must plant correctly and weed and water your garden), and there is a supernatural world that demands a supernatural response (you must make sure no supernatural harm comes to your garden and try to gain supernatural help for its success).

Of course, if you do not get the expected results, it could be because you did not do it right; the failure is with the magician, not the magic. In fact, if the belief is that the ritual must be performed without error for it to succeed, failure of the ritual is direct evidence that the magician made an error. Also, someone else could be doing counter-magic; one person's failure is another person's success. Magic might be performed by two opposing entities, and the more powerful will prevail over the weaker. For example, one village might be using magic to kill members of

another village, whereas people in the latter village might be performing magic to prevent illness and death. Thus warfare is being conducted on a supernatural plane.

Finally, there is the issue of selective memory. We do not remember everything that happens to us. Some things are etched in our memories; other things are quickly forgotten. Successes, even if infrequent, are remembered and are thought of as proof that something works. Memories of failures, even if common, quickly fade with time.

There are documented cases of magic working, especially death magic (i.e., magic is worked against someone who then dies). These are often referred to as antitherapy rituals (see the example in Chapter 4). Is there a physiological basis for such deaths? This issue is discussed by Harry D. Eastwell among the Australian Aborigines of Arnhem Land.[11] Eastwell notes that the basis of such death by magic often is the result of an extreme state of fear. Such fear gives rise to many symptoms, such as agitation, sleeplessness, and sweating. This is further exacerbated by the belief on the part of the victim and his or her family that death is inevitable. Thus as symptoms increase in intensity, the family withdraws support because the patient is seen as socially dead. Because the individual is socially dead, the family will not provide food and water and will often begin funeral rituals before death has occurred.

MAGIC IN SOCIETY

Magic plays an important role in a society's religious practices. We will examine the operation of magic in three societies, the Trobriand Islanders, the Azande, and the Fore. We will also look at the role of magic in Wicca, a Neo-Pagan religion.

Magic in the Trobriand Islands

The Trobriand Islanders, who live off the western coast of New Guinea, distinguish among three types of knowledge. First there is knowledge of things in the everyday world, which is shared by all or a large group of adult members of the society. This is what a child learns from his or her parents and may be appropriate to one or the other gender. For example, boys might learn how to garden, and girls might learn how to weave mats. This is put to use in the everyday activities that are a part of the normal pattern of living.

A second form of knowledge is more specialized and is shared with a limited number of individuals. This includes expert knowledge that is necessary for task specializations, such as sailing or woodcarving. This form also includes knowledge of particular magical rituals that tend to be learned by many members of the society.

The highest level includes knowledge of the most complex and valued technological skills, such as canoe building, as well as knowledge of myths, songs, and dances. These skills are important to the community, and a person who has such skills is called *tokabitam,* "man with knowledge." This level of knowledge includes knowledge of important magic, such as rain magic and garden magic. This knowledge is of great importance to the community, and the relatively few people who possess such knowledge are very important people, in terms of both prestige and wealth, because the services of such people are paid for.

LEARNING MAGIC. Although many forms of magic are well known among adult members of a community, much magical lore is the private property of individuals. The most common way to obtain magic is to learn it from one's parents, grandparents, or other kin. Thus certain types of magic frequently are associated with particular family lines. Sometimes the magic is owned by

The thousands of available medicines can be placed in a series of categories based on their purposes. There are those that control nature, such as rain. One is used to delay sunset so that the person will have time to reach home before dark. Many medicines are associated with horticulture and hunting. For example, medicines are used to direct the flight of a spear or an arrow into the prey and to protect the hunter from dangerous animals. Craftsmen, such as blacksmiths, have their own magic to aid in their task. Some medicines are used against witches and sorcerers. Magic is used to bring about success in love and to guarantee a safe journey. An important function of magic is to avenge murder, theft, and adultery. Finally, diseases are cured by using specific medicines.

There are several ways in which the medicine is used. For example, plant material may be burned and, using oil, made into a paste that is then rubbed into incisions made on the face or torso; or the medicine may be made into an infusion that is drunk. A man may make a whistle out of a particular variety of wood and keep this whistle tied around his waist. He blows it in the morning soon after waking up as a protection against misfortune. This very simple type of ritual is very common. But even more important rituals tend to be performed privately so that an enemy will not know that it is being performed and use other magic to interfere with the effects of the ritual. In some cases a man might not want others to know that he owns a particular medicine. He does not want to be pestered by kin to perform the magic for them.

Zande magic rites are not very formal, nor are they usually public. Although there are some public rituals, such as war magic performed by a chief, most magic is performed by a single individual for his or her immediate need. There are a number of ritual actions that need to be performed; yet the order of their performance will vary.

The ritual itself is usually quite simple. It involves manipulating the medicine and reciting a spell. The spell is not formal. The individual simply addresses the medicine and tells it what he or she wants done. Unlike magical spells in other societies, power does not reside in the spell. Rather the power resides in the medicine, and the spell is simply a way of waking up the power and giving the power instructions. The manner is quite informal; the only requirement is that the

The location of the bundle in cold, muddy ground suggests the deep chill felt by immobilized *kuru* patients. The use of something from the victim, such as hair, is an example of contagious magic. The Fore attempt to prevent *kuru* by attempting to deprive the sorcerer of the materials he needs. Much day-to-day behavior involves the hiding of hair clippings, parings, feces, and food scraps.

The Fore recognize many diseases, some of which correspond to diseases recognized by Western medicine. They are usually seen as the result of sorcery. Many magical techniques use materials that were once in contact with the victim, as in *kuru,* but many use special poisons that are placed where the victim will make contact with them, such as on a trail. In *nankili,* or pleurisy (a lung condition), the sorcerer makes bone needles out of the bones of pigs, cassowary, or possums. He blows smoke on the bone needles to make the needles fly into the victim's body.

Wiccan Magic

Wicca is a **Neo-Pagan** religion, meaning that it is a perceived revival of pre-Christian religious practices (Chapter 11). Although there is great variation within the Wiccan religion, magic is often a central element of ritual. Practitioners see their magical knowledge and rituals as a continuation of thousands of years of folk magic, which was often lost or pushed underground by the spread of Christianity. Wiccans also borrow freely from the magic traditions of various cultures around the world.

The magic ritual usually consists of a stated goal, the manipulation of specific objects, and the observation of special conditions, such as place and time. However, the core of the ritual, what is often considered the "real magic," is movement of energy, which takes place within the practitioner. The magician builds up this energy within herself or himself, and it is released at the right time to bring about the goal of the spell.

Wiccan magic is based on the worldview that there is a power that exists in all things. Through rituals (involving such things as music, dance, visualizations, and the manipulation of objects) this power can be awakened and concentrated and can be set to effect a particular goal, which is the purpose of the spell. The power can also be moved from one person to another or between humans, places, and objects. As this power moves to its intended target, it will have an effect on that target.

Popular objects used in Wiccan spells include crystals, herbs, oils, candles, images, runes, and specific foods. The symbolism of color is also used, as are chanting and creative visualization. The religion is closely connected to nature, and the working of magic spells might require a consideration of the weather, season, lunar phase, and/or time of day. The goal of such magic is often very practical and meant to help with everyday challenges such as relationships, health, protection, money, and employment. Magic is to be used when all else fails and in conjunction with more mundane efforts. For example, the belief is that just doing magic to get a job will not help unless you also take practical measures, such as sending out resumes. Because each individual's personal power is limited, it should not be used lightly.

As we will see in Chapter 11, Wiccan moral rules are such that magic is to be used only for positive purposes. Wiccans often say that they respect life, respect the earth, and respect the power too much to do magic for evil.

DIVINATION

In the previous section we examined the subject of magic, techniques for directly and automatically bringing about desired results through supernatural mechanisms. People use magic for a variety of purposes, such as bringing rain, curing illness, and ensuring fertility. Another way of dealing with

the uncertainties of life is to anticipate them. As the saying goes, "Knowledge is power." If we only knew what the future holds for us or what is happening at the present time in places and situations that are hidden from us, decision making would certainly be easier. We could see the consequences of our actions and learn about unknown variables that affect our lives.

Techniques for obtaining information about things unknown, including events that will occur in the future, is known as **divination**. The word *divination* comes from the same root as the word *divinity*. This implies that divination has to do with the supernatural.

The nature of many forms of divination is magical. Such magical rituals are used to manipulate the supernatural world in order to provide information. In other words, the ends of a magical ritual can be a physical occurrence, such as the coming of rain, or information, such as who will win the Super Bowl. Of course, supernatural beings—ancestors, spirits, and gods—also may have access to unknown information. Many divination techniques involve contact with such supernatural entities, as when a medium contacts the spirit of a deceased individual or when a shaman falls into a trance.

Other forms of divination are based on the idea that the world consists of things and events that are interconnected with one another. We saw this same worldview for the workings of magic. Magic is based on the manipulation of perceived connections between things; divination is based on observing these connections. For example, many people believe that the movements of the planets, sun, and moon are in some way ultimately connected with a person's life and that an understanding of these movements enables one to learn about the future. There is much information in nature, and those who are knowledgeable and observant often make accurate predictions. For example, a change in wind direction during a particular time of the day can foretell the coming of rain. This is a very rational approach, one that leads to planning. But the relationship between some signs is not obvious and, in fact, might not be a true relationship at all. The interpretation of such signs falls into the area of divination.

Forms of Divination

There are many ways of accomplishing an act of divination. To understand these methods better, we can classify various techniques into a number of categories.

A basic characteristic of divination techniques is that some are **inspirational** and others are **noninspirational**. Inspirational forms of divination involve some type of spiritual experience such as a direct contact with a supernatural being through an altered state of consciousness, usually possession. This form of divination is sometimes referred to as **natural** or **emotive divination**. Noninspirational or **artificial** forms are more magical ways of doing divination and include the reading of natural events as well as the manipulation of oracular devices. (The term ***oracle*** usually refers to a specific device that is used for divination and can refer to inspirational or noninspirational forms. Examples are the poison oracle of the Azande, to be described in the following, and a contemporary toy called the Magic 8 Ball.)

We also can divide divination techniques into **fortuitous** and **deliberate** types. Fortuitous forms happen without any conscious effort on the part of the individual. One sees a flight of birds overhead or unexpectedly falls into a trance and has a vision. Deliberate forms are those that someone sets out to do, such as reading tarot cards or examining the liver of a sacrificed animal.

Using these two ways of classifying divination techniques, we can create four categories: fortuitous noninspirational, deliberate noninspirational, fortuitous inspirational, and deliberate inspirational, as shown in Table 7.1.

A familiar example of prophecy is Moses. The book of Exodus tells that Moses was tending his father-in-law's flock and one day led them to the edge of the desert. An angel of God appeared to Moses from within a burning bush. God told Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, but Moses at first did not want to go. He replied, "Who am I, that I should go to pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" God replied, "I will be with you" (Exodus 3).

Deliberate possession involves an overt action whereby the individual falls into a trance. Such people would be called **mediums**. Communication from the deities through possession, usually of a priest, is a very common feature of many religious systems. One example is the Oracle at Delphi, discussed later in this chapter.

ORDEALS. **Ordeals** are painful and often life-threatening tests that a person who is suspected of guilt may be forced to undergo, such as dipping a hand into hot oil, swallowing poison, or having a red-hot knife blade pressed against some part of the body. Ordeals can be thought of as a trial by divination performed on the body of the accused. In some cultures, including past European and American cultures, ordeals were an important part of criminal trials.

Among the Kpelle of Liberia, trials are conducted through the use of the hot knife ordeal. The ordeal is conducted by a specialist, who is licensed by the government. The specialist will heat a knife in a fire and first pass the knife over his own body to show that the ordeal is valid because he himself is not burned. Then the knife is stroked over the body of the accused. If the individual is burned, he is guilty.

Ordeals can rely on the idea, as in Christian Europe, that an ordeal reflected the judgment of God, who would punish the guilty and save the innocent. In most cases it seems that the fact of guilt or innocence itself acted in some magical way to affect the ordeal. For example, in a trial by fire, only the guilty would be burned.

It might appear that in ordeals it is the guilty who suffers, but this is not always the case. In trial by water it is the innocent who runs the risk. The idea is that the pure element of water would reject the impure, being happy to accept and drown an innocent person but casting up and rejecting an impure body such as that of a witch or a criminal. This was extensively used against accused witches. The accused was tied up and tossed into the water. She had a rope on her with a mark at a certain length. If she sank to this point, she was innocent. She would be pulled up and turned loose—if she could be resuscitated. A medieval text reads:[15]

> Consecration to Be Said over the Man. May omnipotent God, who did order baptism to be made by water, and did grant remission of sins to men through baptism: may He, through His mercy, decree a right judgment through that water. If, namely, thou art guilty in that matter, may the water which received thee in baptism not receive thee now; if however, thou art innocent, may the water which received thee in baptism receive thee now. Through Christ our Lord.

Fore Divination

We have already discussed the Fore of New Guinea and the effects of the disease *kuru* in their lives (see Chapter 1). The Fore believe that sorcery is the cause of the disease. Therefore an essential element in dealing with *kuru* is the identification of the sorcerer. The most common divination technique uses a possum as a vehicle for supernatural revelation. The victim's husband, brothers, and husband's age mates place some of the victim's hair clippings in one small bamboo tube. In another tube they insert the body of a freshly killed possum. Striking one

bamboo against the other, they call the name of the supposed sorcerer and then place the bamboo containing the animal in the fire. The guilt of the accused is established if the possum's liver, the locus of its consciousness, remains uncooked. After divination they do not openly accuse a specific person of sorcery, but the suspected sorcerer is subjected to further tests or death magic.

The Fore also consult healers, who usually belong to distant communities and even non-Fore groups. These "dream men," whom we would label mediums, enter altered states of consciousness through the rapid inhaling of tobacco and the use of other plant materials that produce trances and hallucinations. Information is also gleaned from dreams. Such diviners are then able to identify sorcerers.

Oracles of the Azande

Zande oracles have been described in great detail by Evans-Pritchard. The best known are *iwa*, the rubbing-board oracle; *dakpa*, the termite oracle; and *benge*, the poison oracle.

The oracle that is most often used is *iwa*, or the rubbing-board oracle. This is a relatively inexpensive and easy-to-use oracle that can be consulted very quickly. There are many situations in which some answer is urgently needed, such as the sudden onset of an illness, decisions about going on a journey, questions about interpersonal relationships, and a myriad of minor questions. Many older men carry *iwa* on their persons, ready to consult it at a moment's notice. If a man has not acquired or learned to use the oracle, it is quite easy to find a friend or relative who has.

The rubbing-board oracle takes many shapes, but it is relatively small and is always made of wood with a flat, round or oval "female" surface and a "male" piece or lid that fits on top.

The creeper does not grow in Zandeland. It takes a long, difficult journey through the territory of other tribes to procure the poison. This, in part, accounts for the high value the Azande place on the poison oracle. The oracular consultation takes place away from the homesteads where the oracle can be consulted in secrecy without interference from witches. The equipment includes the poison and a basket of chickens. The Azande raise chickens but do not regularly slaughter them for food except on very special occasions. Eggs are not consumed but are permitted to hatch.

It takes experience and skill to become a good operator of the oracle, to judge the amount of poison to be given the chickens, and to observe and interpret the behavior of the chickens. At the start of a consultation the operator, who has observed a number of tabus, prepares the poison. A second man will pose the questions. The operator twirls a grass brush in the liquid poison and squeezes the brush so that the poison runs into the throat of the chicken. Then the questioner begins to address the poison for several minutes, and more poison is given to the chicken. Then the operator takes the chicken in his hand, jerks it back and forth, and finally places it on the ground. The operator and questioner watch as the animal dies or survives. Depending on the way in which the question was phrased and the instructions that are given to the poison, the death or survival of the chicken provides a yes/no answer to the question. We will discuss *benge* further when we discuss Zande witchcraft in Chapter 10, because the poison oracle is the principle method of determining the identity of a witch.

Divination in Ancient Greece: The Oracle at Delphi

Many divination techniques were popular in ancient Greece including oneiromancy (interpretation of dreams), ornithomancy (reading the flight of birds), haruspication (examining the entrails of dead animals), **cleromancy** (casting lots), and the consultation of professional mediums, such as those at Siwah, Didyma, Dodona, and Delphi.

The Temple of Apollo at Delphi was the most important religious site in ancient Greece. The site dates back to 1400 B.C.E. and was built around a sacred spring. The Greeks considered Delphi to be the center (literally the navel) of the world. The oracle at Delphi was consulted for many matters, large and small, by people from all over Greece and beyond. Battles to be fought, voyages to be undertaken, investments to be made were all brought before the oracle, whose answers were often cryptic. It was the oracle at Delphi that warned Oedipus in myth that he would kill his father and marry his mother.

The oracle spoke the word of the god Apollo through the Pythia, a woman who would enter an altered state of consciousness and become possessed by Apollo. Many ancient accounts exist that describe how this divination took place. A person wishing to consult the oracle would first sacrifice an animal and observe whether or not it was a good day to consult the oracle. If the omens were good, the petitioner would wait outside the Adyton, the inner chamber only entered by the Pythia.

Prior to actual consultation with the god Apollo, the Pythia would cleanse herself in the spring, drink water from another sacred spring, and chew on a laurel leaf (a symbol of Apollo). She would seat herself on a tripod which was located over a chasm in the earth (Figure 7.3). Inhaling a pneuma, or sweet-smelling gas, which came from the chasm, she would enter into an altered state of consciousness. Questions, written on lead tablets, were passed in to the Pythia and she would answer. A priest or poet located nearby would then interpret what she had said and record it in verse.

Scholars disagree on how incoherent or how lucid the Pythia's speech was and how much interpreting was done by the priest. Regardless, her answers, in the way of oracles, were not direct. They were often ambiguous, filled with double meanings, or plainly misleading.

FIGURE 7.3 ***Painting of the Pythia.*** Painting on a drinking cup, ca. 440–430 B.C.E. Aegeus, the mythical king of Athens, consults the Pythia, who sits on a tripod. This is the only contemporary image of the Pythia.

For example, the story is told of King Croesus of Lydia, who asked the Pythia if he should make war on the Persians. She answered that if he did, he would destroy a great realm. Croesus went to war, not realizing that the realm he would destroy would be his own.

Although descriptions from Plutarch and others had described the Pythia breathing in gases from the chasm, attempts in the early 1900s to find an actual source of these gases failed. For many years the idea that such a thing had actually taken place was dismissed. Then in the 1980s, a United Nations Development Project began a survey in Greece of active faults. At that time a geologist, Jelle de Boer, found signs that indicated a fault line running along the south slope of Mount Parnassus and under the site of the oracle.[16] Gases and spring water could have reached the surface through cracks created by the fault in the ground below the temple. De Boer began working with an interdisciplinary team including an archaeologist, a chemist, and a toxicologist. This team has suggested that inhaling the gas ethylene could account for the various descriptions of the effects on the Pythia of inhaling the pneuma at Delphi.

Astrology

Quite likely the most popular divination technique practiced in the United States today is astrology that has a history stretching back thousands of years. The basis of astrology is the assumption of a causal relationship between celestial phenomena and terrestrial ones and the influence that the stars and planets have on the lives of human beings. Astrology can be used to examine the life of a specific individual or to divine events of importance to the whole community.

influence and, to some degree, control the nonhuman world through ritual activity. This is the basis of magical thinking.

Although magic at first appears to be an exotic topic, practiced by those in foreign places, in reality magical thinking is a very human way of thinking and is practiced at some time or another by every one of us. The logic of magic not only is the result of our normal mental processes, but also answers our need to have some control over our lives. Magic gives us control and divination gives us knowledge—two of the major functions of religion.

However, there is a negative side to the use of magic and divination. It can give us a sense of control where control does not exist. This can have negative consequences as when the habitual gambler believes that he can control the roll of the dice by addressing the dice or holding them in a particular way. Likewise, many faithfully read their daily horoscope and use the readings to guide important decisions in their lives. While the use of astrology and other divination techniques may be branded as harmless entertainment, they can easily take the place of critical, reasoned thought and analysis.

Magic deals with supernatural forces and thus is a religious phenomenon. In the next two chapters we will turn to what may be a more familiar domain of religi

Suggested Readings

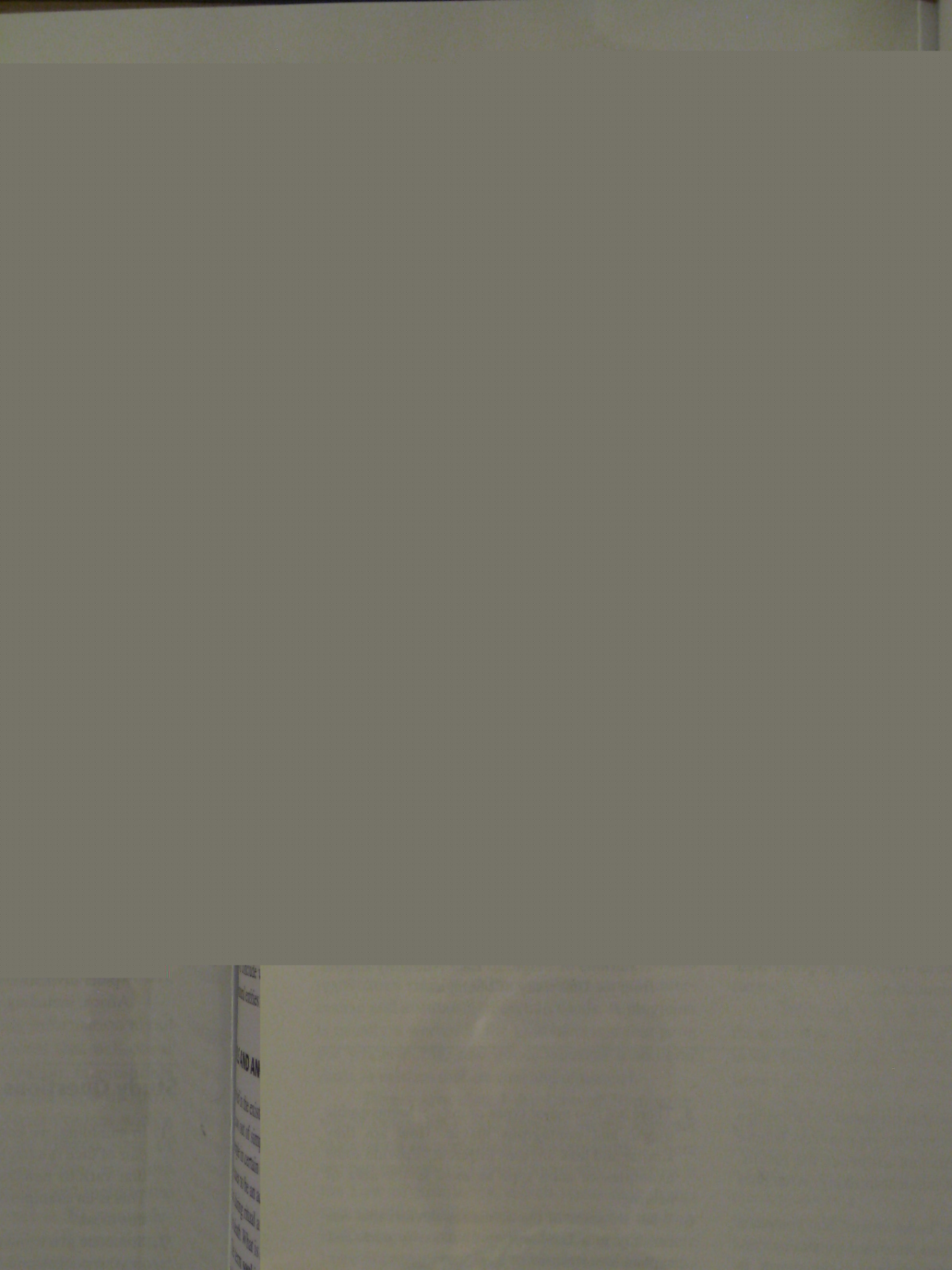
William J. Broad, *The Oracle: The Lost Secrets and Hidden Messages of Ancient Delphi* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).
[A discussion of the oracle in ancient Greek society and the story of the search for a scientific explanation.]

Thomas E. Kida, *Don't Believe Everything You Think: [illegible]*

Stuart Vyse, *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[Examines the psychological and cognitive reasons behind magical thinking.]

Fiction

Ursula K. LeGuin, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (Emeryville,



CHAPTER

8

Souls, Ghosts, and Death

The late-nineteenth-century anthropologist Edward Tylor introduced the concept of animism, a belief in spirit beings that animate all living things (see Chapter 1). Although the spiritual nature of living things can be thought of as a generalized supernatural power, it is seen most frequently as supernatural beings of various kinds. Some supernatural beings live within animals, plants, and natural physical features; others live as independent beings. Some supernatural entities are closely associated with humans, being human in origin; others, like gods and spirits, are usually separate from humans in origin.

This chapter will study supernatural beings that are thought to be the supernatural mirror of animate beings, primarily humans, or are transformed human beings. Important among these are soul and ghosts, which are supernatural manifestations of individuals living and dead. We will conclude with an examination of death rituals that frequently interface with the supernatural entities that are discussed in this chapter.

SOULS AND ANCESTORS

The belief in the existence of a spirit entity residing within a person appears to be a natural one that grows out of simple observations about life. A human being does certain things, interacts with people in certain ways, and has a distinct personality. On the other hand, a person temporarily ceases to be an active being during sleep or when in a faint or coma; during sleep a person dreams; during ritual a person enters a trance. A person permanently ceases to be an animated being in death. What is responsible for all this?

The term **soul** is used to label the noncorporeal, spiritual component of an individual. Although many people are familiar with the presence of spirits within nonhuman animals, most scholars reserve the term *soul* for the spirits that inhabit the human body. Usually, each individual possesses a soul that takes on the personality of the individual (or perhaps the individual takes on the personality of the soul). The soul usually has an existence after death, at least for some period of time.

When one dreams, it is as if one's soul leaves the body and travels rapidly through space and time. It meets up with all sorts of people, including the souls of relatives who have died. In some groups it is considered dangerous to wake someone up suddenly, for there might not be enough time for the soul to return from its travels, and the soul might be lost. On the other hand,

it is not a good idea to murder someone in his or her sleep because the person's soul is absent. It is better to wait until the victim is awake and the soul has returned.

We see a person sleeping, lying inert, devoid of activity and personality. We make the same observation when one faints or goes into a coma. Some believe that when a shaman enters a trance, the shaman's soul has left the shaman's body to travel to a supernatural world. Illness may be caused by the soul having left the body. Death is the permanent withdrawal of the soul from the body. The existence of a soul that survives death is reinforced when a loved one feels the presence of the deceased or experiences visits from the deceased in dreams.

Variation in the Concept of the Soul

Although the concept of a soul can be found in all cultures, the soul takes on a great many forms. The soul may be envisioned as a full-sized duplicate of the living individual, or it may be small and reside somewhere in the body. Where? Perhaps in the liver, the chest, the heart, or the brain. The soul may exist as a person's shadow, so one must be careful where one's shadow falls. Or the soul may be reflected in a mirror, which is why beings without souls, such as vampires, have no reflection. When seeing a photograph for the first time, some people see the image as the soul that has been captured by the photographer.

Many people think of different kinds of souls that reside within the body. One soul might be responsible for a person's animation and will disappear at death. This soul, or life force, may be reincarnated into other living beings. Another soul might be a spirit that is that individual's personality. Different souls may be associated with different parts of the body, or one soul may come from the father's family and another from the mother's.

For example, in Haitian Vodou, there are three spiritual components associated with the physical being. One of these is a spirit known as the *mét-tét,* or "Master of the Head." Its identity is discovered through divination. The *mét-tét* may possess the individual. The other two spiritual components can be seen as souls. The *ti-bonanj,* or "little angel," is a person's consciousness and ego. When the body dies, the *ti-bonanj* stays nearby for a while and then moves on to heaven, where it has little more to do with the living. The *gwo-bonanj,* or "big angel," comes from the ancestral spirits and is returned after death. It is a part of Bondye, the "High God," and is a person's life force that determines, in part, his or her character and intelligence. If a person has lived a good life, the person's memory will be kept for many generations, and his or her *gwo-bonanj* may be prayed to.

You may be born with souls, but other souls may be acquired during your lifetime. The Jivaro of Ecuador (Amazon culture area) believe that a person has three souls. Every person is born with a *nekas,* or the soul that is the life force. The second soul, the *aruntam,* has to be acquired through a vision. The Jivaro see this life as false and the spiritual world as real. Only by acquiring an *aruntam* can a person enter into the real, spiritual world. Acquiring this soul is also believed to give a person power, intelligence, and self-confidence. The third soul, the *miusak,* is the "avenging soul." If a person's *aruntam* is killed, the *miusak* will avenge the death. It is this belief that gives rise to the practice of headhunting. The *miusak* is believed to reside in the head; capturing and ritually shrinking the head are believed to neutralize it.

In some cultures the soul is created anew for each child. Beliefs differ as to when and how the soul enters into the child. For example, the Roman Catholic belief that the soul enters the child at conception has influenced their position on such issues as cloning and abortion. In other cultures the soul may have a previous existence before it starts a new life.

Souls, Death, and the Afterlife

The concept of a soul is very closely tied to ideas about death. As Nigel Barley writes, "notions of what it means to be dead are always part of a more general idea of what it means to be a living human being in the first place and funerary behaviour and beliefs around the world read like an extended discussion of the notion of the person."[1]

As far as anthropologists are aware, there are no cultures that do not have a soul-like concept and no cultures that do not believe that this soul survives the death of the body, at least for some period of time. Where there is a belief in multiple souls, the different souls may have different destinations after death, including surviving for different lengths of time. In most cultures the idea of the soul after death is based more on continuity with life than with immortality, as is common in the West.

Souls that live after death may spend some time near their family, often until the funeral is completed, and then may travel someplace else or be reincarnated. One of the functions of funeral rituals is to aid the soul in its journey. Sometimes these journeys are dangerous and difficult, and a soul might perish on the journey or might end up in a not-so-nice place. In some religious systems the duration of a soul's residence after death is finite, and the soul is reborn in another individual or, in the case of **transmigration**, into the body of an animal.

The ability of a soul to survive its journey to the land of the dead may depend on the quality of the person's life. In such societies the life is judged, and the threat of failing to "pass the test" to enter paradise can act as a means of social control. On the other hand, in many groups all souls make it to wherever souls go after death, or only those who have memorized particular rituals or who have had elaborate funeral rituals. It is not always the good that successfully make the journey; often it is the wealthy and powerful.

Where is the land of the dead, and what is it like? The final destination of the soul is usually at some distance from the place where the person lived. It is often located at a known geographic place, such as a mountaintop or island, or a place that is "over the horizon." Often it is located in a place that is not considered a part of the normal physical world, such as in the sky or underground. Although we in the West tend to think of the physical afterlife as a paradise, in many cultures it is surprisingly similar to the physical community on earth. In the afterlife the dead socialize, hunt, and have sex. However, there is no illness, and the dead interact with their ancestors.

Not all souls go to the same afterlife. Many people have special places for souls depending on certain attributes. For example, warriors who have died in battle, women who have died in childbirth, or persons who have died by suicide might go to special places. There may be special places for the souls of certain social classes or occupational groups, such as shamans. For example, Valhalla was the special place for Viking warriors who died a good death, that is, died in battle. In this case both social status and manner of death were important.

Examples of Concepts of the Soul

In this section we will examine soul beliefs in several societies, including the Yup'ik of Alaska, the Yanomamö of South America, and the Hmong of Southeast Asia, as well as Roman Catholic, Hindu, and Buddhist beliefs.

YUP'IK SOULS. Many religious systems believe in the recycling of souls. Among the Yup'ik of western Alaska, a newborn has the soul of someone who has recently died in the grandparental generation, after whom the child is named. After death, the soul remains nearby for a period of

On death, the soul of the seal retracts to its bladder. The Yup'ik collect all of the bladders from the seals killed during the year. They are inflated and hung throughout a five-day festival and then are shoved through a hole in the ice into the water, where the souls are eventually reborn.

YANOMAMÖ SPIRITS AND SOULS. The Yanomamö (Tropical Forest culture area) believe in a complex of souls. The main part of the soul becomes a *no borebö* at death. The Yanomamö cosmos is composed of four layers. The living Yanomamö live on the third layer, and on death the *no borebö* moves up to the second layer, where it moves down a trail until it encounters a spirit named Wadawadariwä. The spirit asks the soul whether it has been stingy or generous. If the soul replies that it has been stingy, it is sent to a place of fire, but if it has been generous, it joins the ancestors. One would assume that the possibility of being sent to a place of fire would act as a constraint on negative behavior during life, but Wadawadariwä is thought to be somewhat stupid and will accept what the soul tells him, which is why everyone is generous and is sent to the village of the ancestors.

Another aspect of the soul is the *bore,* which is released during cremation. It remains on earth and lives in the jungle. Some *bore* possess bright glowing eyes and will attack people who are traveling through the jungle at night.

The third aspect of the soul is the *möamo,* which lies within the body near the liver. Shamans will use their powers to remove the *möamo* from the body of their enemies, who will become sick and die. Much of the activity of shamans is divided between stealing the souls of enemies and recovering the souls of members of their own community.

In addition, everyone has a *nonoshi,* or animal, which is born each time a human child is born and will develop and grow along with the child. The animal is the person's double, and what happens to one will happen to the other. When either the person or his or her *nonoshi* dies, the other dies. The most common *nonoshi* for males are large birds, and for females are land animals.

A person's *nonoshi* lives far away. Therefore a person has no physical contact with his or her own *nonoshi*. Still it is possible for someone else living where the *nonoshi* lives to kill the *nonoshi,* usually by accident, then the person associated with it dies. If possible, the dead person's relatives will seek vengeance by killing the murderer. Every once in a while, hunters will encounter an animal that shows unusual behavior. Such an animal is either an evil spirit or someone's *nonoshi*. It is never killed.

HMONG SOULS. The Hmong are a people living in the mountainous regions of Southeast Asia. Large numbers of Hmong from Laos immigrated to the United States after the end of the Vietnam War.

The Hmong believe that a person possesses a number of souls—some sources say as many as thirty. Health is the result of a balance between the physical body and its souls. When one or more of the souls are lost or stolen, the person falls ill.

A soul may be frightened out of the body by a traumatic event, or it may be stolen by a spirit. Anne Fadiman, in her book *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down,* tells the story of a Hmong family living in Merced, California.[2] The story centers on a little girl, Lia. One day Lia's sister came into the house and slammed the door, frightening Lia's soul out of her body. The loss of the soul resulted in an illness, which the Hmong call by a phrase that translates as "the spirit catches you and you fall down." The spirit being referred to is a soul-stealing spirit. This illness is diagnosed as epilepsy in Western medicine.

Curing such illnesses falls to the shaman. The shaman enters an altered state of consciousness to search for the lost soul and, if it is found, will return it to the patient's body. If the soul

was stolen by a spirit, the shaman will negotiate with the spirit for the return of the soul. Gifts will be offered, and the soul of a sacrificed animal will be offered in exchange for the soul of the sick individual.

After the birth of a child its placenta (afterbirth) is buried under the dirt floor of the house. The word used by the Hmong for the placenta can be translated as "jacket," and it is thought of as a piece of clothing. At death the soul travels back to the place where the person's placenta was buried and puts on its placenta jacket. This allows the soul to travel on the dangerous path to the place where the ancestors live. If the soul fails to locate its placenta jacket, it will wander for eternity, never to be reunited with its ancestors.

THE SOUL IN ROMAN CATHOLICISM. The doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church states that after death the destiny of each soul is determined by God, based primarily on the person's behavior during life. The main issue is the presence of sin, which is defined as a moral evil. People who are free of sin and are perfectly pure will go to Heaven, where they will be with God and will experience perfect happiness. Although God is considered to be omnipresent, Heaven is considered to be His home; in general it is conceived of as being in the sky.

Souls that are in a state of grace but in need of purification go to **Purgatory**. The word *Purgatory* comes from the Latin *purgare,* meaning to make clean or to purify. Purgatory exists for those souls who die with lesser faults for which the person had not repented or for which the penalty was not entirely paid during life. For example, venial sins are considered a consequence of human frailty and are considered pardonable, requiring only temporary punishment. These sins can be dealt with by time spent in Purgatory. This is necessary because nothing less than the

BENG ANCESTORS AND REINCARNATION. In some societies the soul travels to a new home; in others the soul is recycled into another being. When a person dies among the Beng of West Africa, the soul becomes a spirit that travels to *wrugbe*, one of many invisible spirit villages. After a while, the spirit is reborn as a human baby, although the spirit continues to exist as an ancestor. The individual exists both as a reincarnated being on earth and, at the same time, as an ancestral spirit.

Every individual born is a reincarnation of an ancestor. Sometimes the identity of the ancestor is known. In the case of a child born on the same day a family member dies, the newborn is thought to be an instant reincarnation of the deceased. Knowing which ancestor has been reincarnated in a particular newborn has important consequences, because it is assumed that the child has the same personality traits of the ancestor and is treated as such. Most often, however, the identity of the ancestor remains unknown.

People are able to travel to *wrugbe* in their dreams to consult with ancestors. The ancestors also live with the family. At night a bowl of food is prepared for the ancestors and the family and the ancestors sleep together. They return to *wrugbe* during the day.

When a baby is born, the spirit does not move from *wrugbe* to this world all at once, but emerges over a period of several years. This emergence does not even begin until the umbilical cord falls off. A mixture of herbs is placed on the cord to dry it out so it will fall off sooner and the infant can begin to move from *wrugbe* into the living world. If an infant should die before the [illegible] of the death because the child's spirit had [illegible] off, there is no funeral or public

The next day, the body is wrapped in cloth, and an effigy is made on which the family hangs the personal possessions of the deceased. A few weeks later a water buffalo is prepared, and the body leaves the house along with household items and provisions for the soul's journey. The body is moved toward the burial site along with the effigy, which is usually a frame of bamboo but is carved of wood for an important person. Now the rituals begin that will separate the physical corpse from the *bombo*. The buffalo is sacrificed, and the corpse is buried in a limestone cliff. If the effigy is carved of wood, it is placed on a ledge in the cliff along with other effigy figures.

The soul has now become an ancestor, and it begins its journey southward to Puya with the guardian buffalo. However, suicides, lepers, and people who did not play according to the rules of society are not allowed to enter Puya. The life of a *nene* in Puya is very much like one's life while breathing. The *nene* has the same social rank as in life and is still wealthy or poor. The *nene* keeps an eye on the family to be sure that it is being properly honored. The *nene* has the power to bring aid and blessings as well as harm.

Some time after the funeral the descendants perform the rituals to transform the *nene* into a *deata* (god). Whereas the *nene* lives in the smoke-descending realm, the *deata* moves to the smoke-ascending realm. The *deata* joins the other spirits in the trees, mists, and sky and continues to watch over its descendants, who continue to offer sacrifices.

ANCESTORS AND THE DEPARTED IN JAPAN. In Japan, household-level religious activities have been the main means of contacting the supernatural. Understanding the structure and importance of the household is essential to understanding relationships between the living and the dead. The household is a corporate group that ideally will exist perpetually from the time of its founding. One becomes a member of a household through kinship, but an individual may be rejected if they are seen as unsuitable. There are four key household roles for the living: the master and mistress of the house, the heir and his bride. If any of these roles are empty, the household is essentially incomplete and the roles should ideally be filled, often by recruiting someone from the outside. Marriage alone does not create a new line. For example, if the mistress dies before the birth of an heir, her soul is believed to return to the household in which she was born.

On death, the body is disposed of within a few days and the soul enters a period of uncertainty. As in many other cultures, the soul is polluted by death and becomes potentially dangerous. The soul may wander for many weeks before it is purified and made safe by a series of rituals. These rituals usually end forty-nine days after the death, although occasionally the living feel it necessary to do additional rituals after this time. The soul then enters the clean and peaceful world of the deceased and the ancestors.

David Plath made a distinction for Japanese souls between the departed and the ancestors.[3] The departed are generally household members who died in recent memory. When a person dies, a tablet is prepared and is preserved and displayed in the house on a shelf or cabinet reserved for that use. The deceased is remembered as an individual and the anniversary of the person's death date will be celebrated until no one is left who knew that person alive. At this time, the departed person will be retired to the ranks of the ancestors and the personal tablet is destroyed.

Ancestors are thus dead regular household members that are not in living memory. Included in this category are the founder of the household and people who were regular members of the household at death. Any people born into the household, but who married out, were adopted out, or left to start a new household are not included. The ancestors usually share a single generic tablet, remembered more as a collective than as individuals.

required rituals and make offerings; if this is not done, the spirit will hover close to the living, often in the form of a ghost, and cause misfortune. Also, if an individual dies under conditions of great emotional stress, the spirit will remain in the world of the living as a ghost and haunt the individuals who are responsible for its anguish. Many folktales tell of murder victims and unrequited lovers who are so distraught at the moment of death that they remain on earth as ghosts.

Ghosts are frequently depicted in traditional Japanese art. For example, some drawings show a female ghost "with long straight hair and waving or beckoning hands. Pale clothing with long, flowing sleeves was draped loosely about the seemingly fragile figure, and the head and upper part of the body were strongly delineated. From the waist down, however, the form was misty and tapered into nothingness."[4]

The Living Dead: Vampires and Zombies

Stories of resurrection from death are found in the mythology of many religious traditions. From the Egyptian god Osiris, the Hebrew prophet Elijah, who could raise the dead and is himself expected to return, to Lazarus and Jesus, stories are told of those who die but later return to life. In these examples the individual is seen as special and the resurrection has great religious significance. In other cases, the dead returning to life is more ordinary. The resurrection can be seen as positive, as when a person is allowed to return to life to comfort her family. Or it can be seen as negative, as when a person returns to life to bring about death and destruction. In this section we will look at examples of the latter, namely vampires and zombies. Both are familiar creatures in the United States where countless books, movies, television shows, and video games feature vampires and zombies as their main characters. However, the folk beliefs that underlie these creatures are often quite different from popular renditions.

VAMPIRES. Much of U.S. vampire lore is largely based on Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula,* published in 1897. Stoker based his book loosely on the historical figure of Vlad Tepes, or Vlad the Impaler, but made numerous changes. Tepes was a Romanian prince, not a count, who ruled in Walachia, not Transylvania, and who was never viewed as a vampire by the local population. In fact, Tepes is a local hero in Romania. More recently, vampires have been the focus of many popular books and movies, including the Twilight and Sookie Stackhouse series that portray vampires as dangerous but romantic figures.

The vampire is a creature that was considered to be real throughout much of Europe, primarily in parts of Eastern Europe, and they bear little resemblance to the depictions in these novels. Vampires were more likely to be shabbily dressed peasants than elegant counts and were certainly not seen as romantic in any way. So who or what is a vampire? A vampire was believed to be someone who had recently died but who had returned to bring death to others.

The interest in vampires and the documentation of cases of vampirism began in the eighteenth century when parts of Serbia and Walachia were turned over to Austria. Austrian patrol officials began recording the local custom of exhuming dead bodies and "killing" them. An important case comes from the Serbian village of Medvegia in the 1730s. The following is a translated report of the case.[5]

> [A] local haiduk [a type of soldier] named Arnold Paole broke his neck in a fall from a hay wagon. This man had, during his lifetime, often revealed that, near Gossowa in Turkish Serbia, he had been troubled by a vampire, wherefore he had eaten from the earth of the vampire's grave and smeared himself with the vampire's blood, in order

There are a few documented cases that, although controversial, seem to show that zombification actually occurs. These involve people whose death and burial were documented and who were then observed to return. On the basis of these cases a Haitian psychiatrist named Dr. Lamarque Douyon requested the help of an ethnobotanist to track down the zombie powder. Dr. Douyon thought that the victim was given a drug that made him or her appear to be dead. After the burial the person who had administered the powder would dig up and revive the victim. Dr. Douyon received help from Wade Davis, then a graduate student at Harvard University. Davis's account of his research was published in 1985 in the book *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, which was later made into a movie.[7]

Davis claims that he was able to acquire some of the zombie powder and analyze it. The key ingredient turned out to be pieces of dried puffer fish. Puffer fish is considered a delicacy in Japan, where only specially licensed chefs are allowed to prepare it owing to the poisonous nature of the fish. A small amount of the poison is considered exhilarating. It causes tingling of the spine, prickling of the lips and tongue, and euphoria. Still, several dozen Japanese people every year get tetrodotoxin poisoning from eating puffer fish, and some die. A victim of this kind of poisoning is likely to make a full recovery if he or she survives the first few hours. So why do Haitian poisoning victims end up zombies but Japanese victims do not?

Davis pointed out the importance of cultural context and expectations. Haitians who practice Vodou believe that it is possible for a powerful priest to control the part of the soul known as *ti-bonaj*. This soul is associated with a person's personality and individuality. When the person's *ti-bonaj* is captured, the person is deprived of will, and his or her body can be held as a slave. These beliefs are necessary underpinnings to the zombification phenomenon. Davis also suggested that the threat of zombification is used as a social control mechanism.

Davis's theory is very controversial, as are some of his research methods. Some question whether he paid for the zombie powder and participated in the exhumation of the corpse. Even more damaging is the inability of others to find tetrodotoxin in samples of the powder or to verify how the powder would work. In all, Davis's work remains unproven but provides an interesting hypothesis.

ZOMBIES IN MODERN AMERICAN CULTURE. The U.S. military occupation of Haiti (1915–1934) brought an awareness of Haitian culture and Vodou. By 1932 the first American zombie horror movie, *White Zombie*, had been released. The movie with the largest impact on portrayals of zombies though is George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Romero portrayed zombies not as driven by a Vodou priest to work but instead as driven to eat flesh, starting the popular culture association of zombies and eating brains.

Supernatural figures reflect our contemporary fears and anxieties. With zombies, we see both a fear of losing our individuality to become part of the zombie horde and apocalyptic themes based on anxieties about the government and large corporations. Zombies are often said to have been created due to radiation or government or corporate experiments gone awry, such as in the movie and games *Resident Evil*. The general movie or video game scenario pits a small group of heroes against the encroaching zombie horde, often part of a larger societal collapse or conflict. The classic video game *Wolfenstein 3D*, for example, pits the player against zombie Nazis during World War II. Unlike Haitian zombies, the modern zombie is a monster who can be killed guilt-free.

Zombies have seen a cultural resurgence in recent years, surpassing even vampires in their popularity. Unlike vampires who only threaten one individual at a time and have often been cast as romantic figures, zombies menace the entire human race and are portrayed as mindless, shambling, and decaying. An element of comedy is also often present in modern zombie portrayals.

THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND. Much of our knowledge of history comes from written documents. Written records, however, document only a few segments of society, usually the important and literate, and those activities, such as shipping, that require that careful records be kept. Answering specific historical questions will send the researcher to archives, genealogical records, and old newspapers. But what about the uneducated, the poor, and the disenfranchised? Although they might have played important roles in society, their very existence remains poorly documented.

For example, we normally do not think of slavery in northern cities, yet slaves in New York City in the eighteenth century made up a significant portion of the population at that time. And people die and need to be buried. People of European ancestry built churches with adjacent cemeteries within the city limits, but those on the fringes of society, such as slaves, had to bury their dead on land outside of the city limits that was set aside for this purpose.

A cemetery containing the remains of slaves was discovered in New York City in 1991 when contractors started to excavate a lot for a new government office building in lower Manhattan. Located at Broadway and Reade Street, it is known today as the African Burial Ground (Figure 8.2).

This cemetery dates from the eighteenth century and was in use until 1795. At this time it was located several miles outside the limits of a city that was considerably smaller than it is today. Over 400 skeletons were removed for analysis and later reburied.

Besides the skeletons themselves, there is much evidence of cultural practices. Many of the

body is then removed to the funeral home, where it is prepared by embalming. (Not all bodies are embalmed. Orthodox Judaism, for example, prohibits embalming; the bodies are refrigerated, and burial takes place soon after death.)

The purpose of embalming in the United States today is not to preserve the body for eternity, as in the case of Egyptian mummification, but to hold off the start of decay until the funeral is completed and to give the body a lifelike appearance for purposes of display. People feel that it is necessary to view the body to demonstrate that the individual is indeed dead. This makes the death seem real. They will go to great lengths to recover bodies for this purpose. In the case of major disasters, expensive recovery operations are mounted for the purpose of recovering remains, which then become the focal point of death rituals.

Before the funeral ritual there is often a viewing, at which the body is put on display. There is little formal ritual at a viewing, yet there are what appear to be standards in the objects that are displayed (such as flowers and photographs), people dressing in somber colors, and words that are said to the survivors. People often sit or stand around and tell stories of the deceased.

People in the United States have relatively little experience with death compared with members of other societies and are often ill at ease in its presence. Commonly, a person will not attend his or her first funeral until adulthood. In other societies children would be present throughout a person's illness, death, and funeral. There is also a special vocabulary for things associated with U.S. funerals that is thought to be more acceptable than more traditional terms—*funeral director* for undertaker and *casket* for coffin, for example.

The viewing is followed by the funeral ritual, which may be religious or secular. U.S. funeral rituals are relatively short, usually lasting a half hour to a full hour. Typically, friends, neighbors, and coworkers will take a few hours off of a normal working day to attend the

FIGURE 8.3 ***The Day of the Dead.*** A woman in Michoacan, Mexico, decorates a grave during *Día de los Muertos.*

referred to as the "folk Catholicism" of Mexico, the dead are seen as

personality when all that remains is a corpse. So important to us are the souls of other people that they often remain a part of the world of the living, numbered among the beings that populate the supernatural world.

Our unease about death manifests itself in supernatural creatures such as ghosts, vampires, and zombies. Through these beings the divisions between life and death become less clear and many other cultural anxieties come into play. In the next chapter we will turn our attention to other supernatural beings more commonly associated with religion: gods and spirit beings.

Summary

The belief in the existence of a spirit entity residing within a person appears to have grown out of observations of sleep, coma, and death. A soul is the noncorporeal, spiritual component of an individual. Usually, each individual possesses a soul that takes on the personality of the individual and has an existence after death. During life the soul may leave the body. Dreams are seen as adventures of the soul, and illness may be caused by an absence of a soul that must be retrieved by a shaman. Death is the permanent withdrawal of the soul. How the soul is perceived varies widely, including the number of although their role is sometimes ambiguous. In contrast, vampires and zombies are creatures that have no souls. Vampires are believed to be individuals who have recently died, usually before their time, and have returned to bring death to others. The body of an alleged vampire will be exhumed and "killed" or destroyed in some way. Zombies are corpses that have been raised from their graves and animated.

Death rituals or funerals are rites of passage that move the individual from the status of living person to that of ancestor or other post-death status. Funerals vary among cultures in a

CHAPTER

9

Gods and Spirits

Ghosts, ancestors, and vampires are transformed human beings. However, there are many supernatural beings that generally do not have human origins. These supernatural beings include **gods** and **spirits**. Although we recognize these as two separate types of supernatural entities, this division is to some degree arbitrary. Generally speaking, gods are individualized supernatural beings, each with a distinctive name, personality, and sphere of influence that encompasses the life of an entire community or a major segment of the community. Spirits are generally less powerful than gods and usually are more localized. Frequently, they are collections of nonindividualized supernatural beings that are not given specific names and identities.

Supernatural beings are usually a crucial aspect of a religious system; many anthropologists have defined religion by the presence of such beings. Myths describe the actions of these beings, and their behavior may be seen as a model for human behavior. Rituals are often directed toward superhuman beings—to placate, praise, or make requests.

SPIRITS

Nonindividualized spirits include the leprechauns of Ireland, the jinn of the Middle East, and the kami of Japan. There are also spirits that are individually recognized, such as a guardian spirit, an ancestral spirit, and a shaman's spirit helper. In contrast with gods, spirits are less powerful and are more focused on particular individuals, families, or groups of specialists.

Whereas gods may live in a remote location, such as Mount Olympus, the home of the Greek gods, spirits live in the human world, interacting with humans and concerned about what humans are up to. Spirits often exhibit complex personalities. They may be friendly or harmful. They may bring success, and luck but also are blamed for minor mishaps. One can ask for [illegible] and are involved in everyday human

dangerous. They may be venerated, and people will often travel to such places to seek solutions to problems or to ask favors of the spirits. Unusual natural objects—such as a remarkable or strange stone or plant—may contain a spirit, as might a human-made object such as a statue or a **shrine.** Sometimes special structures are built and spirits are enticed to take up residence in them to provide protection or good luck to the builder.

The Dani View of the Supernatural

The Dani live in the highlands of New Guinea, in the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya. This description of spirits is based on a study of the Mulia Valley Dani.

The study of Dani religion brings the paired concepts of emic and etic into clear focus (Chapter 1). Because the Dani themselves seldom articulate their belief system, it becomes exceedingly difficult for an outsider to learn about Dani religious practices from an insider, or emic, perspective. As is the case with many religions, to the outsider, Dani religion appears to be confusing and illogical. Questions about rituals and beliefs are greeted either by silence or by the familiar "That is just the way we do things" or "This is the way our fathers did it." Sometimes the question elicits a specific myth.

An anthropologist, using an outsider or etic perspective, can attempt to understand the underlying structure and logic of Dani beliefs and practices, although the Dani themselves might not understand or accept this structure and logic. For example, anthropologist Douglas James Hayward notes that the Dani appear to organize their world into complementary pairs.[1] Their physical landscape is divided into cultivated and noncultivated land, and animals are divided into those that live in association with people and those that do not. Their society is organized in terms of a system in which all individuals are placed into one of two social groups that intermarry with one another. Using the principle of complementary pairs, Hayward divides the Dani supernatural world into several categories by using three criteria: Are the beings physical or spirit? Are they beneficent or malevolent? Are they close or far away?

The beings that inhabit the Dani world are either spirit or physical ("truly present"). Physical beings are mortal and are subject to the laws of nature. They include people, animals, and plants. Spirit beings are immortal and are not subject to the laws of nature. However, this classification does not necessarily correspond to our dichotomy between spirit and physical. For example, the sun is believed to be a real woman and thus a physical being, albeit one with unusual abilities.

The identification of a being as beneficent or malevolent also is not as easy as it first appears, for the categorization of a being as beneficent or malevolent often depends on context. For example, ghosts are spirits of the recently deceased that linger near the village in which they once lived, reluctant to leave. If the community fails to perform funeral rituals in a satisfactory manner, the ghost becomes disappointed and may cause trouble for the community. Although ghosts have a negative influence on Dani life, they also can be beneficent. Ghosts are consulted in divination ceremonies. They also warn the community of the approach of an enemy raiding party.

The focus of Dani rituals is aimed at those spirit beings that live close by and play significant roles in their lives. This includes close beneficent spirits such as guardian spirits. Everyone has a guardian spirit, but whereas boys are introduced to their spirits during initiation rituals, women never get to know their guardian spirits.

An important group of close beneficent spirits is spirits associated with nature. These include forest spirits, rain spirits, and flood spirits. The *weya* spirits control the rains. When they become violent, they send lightning storms, and trees that have been struck by lightning are

evidence of their presence and power. However, they are classified as benevolent beings because they bring the rain.

Included among the close malevolent spirits are forest spirits and swamp spirits. In the forest lurk male forest spirits who seduce women traveling alone through the forest. The forest also contains female forest spirits, who seduce men by taking the form of their wives and girlfriends. Sexual intercourse with such a spirit brings about death for the man (unless a pig has

beneath the drawings. Naked except for a blanket, he waits for the vision. The vision is brought on by a combination of fasting, enduring the cold, sleep deprivation, and smoking tobacco. What is actually seen varies but commonly includes trials to be overcome before the spirit appears, often as an animal, to bestow supernatural power. The spirit frequently gives the man specific instructions, such as wearing a special item or avoiding certain people or behaviors. For example, a deer spirit that gives the gift of speed while running might instruct the man to wear a deer tail sewn on his clothes or on a ribbon around his neck. Among the Shoshoni, a man can acquire several guardian spirits to aid him.

Jinn

The Qur'an tells of God's creation of three types of conscious beings: humans made from clay, **angels** made from light, and **jinn** made from fire without smoke. Jinn are normally invisible, but they can make themselves visible, and in doing so, they often take the form of a human or an animal. Once visible, they can alter their shape and features at will. Jinn are born, live, and die; they marry, mate, and have families. Some have great powers; others do not. Many are specifically known and named; others occur as a part of an unnamed collective of spirits. Like people, jinn have different personalities, some good and some bad. They may lie and deceive people; they enjoy playing tricks and kidnapping people; and they often tempt humans into sexual intercourse.

Sometimes a person can forge a special relationship with a jinn, and then the jinn becomes a source of special powers. For example, a person can enter into an alliance with a jinn and become a powerful magician. The Genii of the Aladdin story is a jinn, and the stories of the *Arabian Nights* are largely stories involving jinn. But generally, people try to keep a distance between themselves and jinn because, more often than not, jinn are troublemakers. People will frequently recite verses from the Qur'an or avoid situations that attract the attention of jinn. This is the origin of many tabus surrounding blood, childbirth, and marriage, because these are situations that are very attractive to jinn. The very existence of jinn causes people to be careful, yet they also provide an explanation for illness and bad luck.

SPIRIT POSSESSION IN THE SUDAN. Anthropologist Janice Boddy describes the presence of jinn in the small Arabic-speaking village of Hofriyat in the northern Sudan.[2] The Hofriyati recognize three types of jinn. White jinn have little effect on humans, whereas black jinn, or devils, are dangerous, and possession by black jinn often leads to serious illness and death. However, the most frequently encountered are red jinn called *zairan* (singular: *zar*). The red color symbolizes an association with blood and fertility. *Zairan* are capable of causing illness. Such illnesses must be dealt with, but they are seldom fatal.

The world of the *zairan* parallels the world of humans. *Zairan* belong to different religions, occupations, and ethnic groups, and they exhibit a range of behaviors, some good and some bad. In other words, they are very much like humans, mixing both good and bad traits, but generally they tend to be amoral and capricious. The Hofriyati recognize jinn that are identified as representing diverse ethnic and social groups. Some are Europeans, West Africans, Ethiopians, Arabs, and so forth, representing outside groups with which they have had contact in the past. Yet there are no *zairan* who resemble the Hofriyati themselves.

Spirit possession occurs when a *zar* enters the body of a woman. Most possession occurs in women of childbearing age, and close to half of the adult women in the community are possessed. In these communities the life of a woman is very restricted. Physically, she

remains within the high walls of the family compound, where she is segregated from the men, eating and even sleeping in separate quarters. Her worth and happiness depend on her fertility and her ability to produce sons. The production of sons and their survival are women's tasks, and men are not to blame in the case of failure. A woman who does not have children, miscarries, or has only daughters or whose children die young is accorded a very low position in the society. She may be divorced by her husband or may have to accept a co-wife in the marriage.

Therefore there is a great deal of anxiety in marriage, and this anxiety often leads to depression. In this case a woman may be possessed by a *zar*. However, it also is possible that the misfortune surrounding her reproductive life. Once the *zar* has entered

battle with the good angels, were cast from heaven. Satan and the demons are believed to be closely associated with human evil, including the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden and their dominion over hell.

One common activity of demons, as described in the New Testament, is demonic possession. This was considered a major cause of strange behaviors by humans and much of Jesus' healing ministry involved performing demonic exorcism.

In the period roughly between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, Christian demonology reached its peak. Beliefs about demons were elaborated and had much social influence. Ornate doctrines were produced detailing the hierarchies, invocation, methods, and exorcism of demons. This was the era of the infamous Witchcraze (see Chapter 10), during which there was a particular interest in **incubi** and **succubae**. Incubi and succubae are, respectively, male and female demons who have sex with humans while they sleep. Sex with an incubus was said to be responsible for the birth of demons, witches, and deformed children.

The belief in demonic possession is still common today among conservative Christians, both Catholic and Protestant. For many of these groups a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible requires a belief in demons and demonic exorcism, because they are mentioned so frequently in the New Testament. See Box 9.1 for a discussion of Christian exorcism.

GODS

Generally speaking, gods are more powerful than spirits. They possess great supernatural power and control or influence major forces of nature, such as the wind, rain, and fertility. Gods are personalized individuals with names, origins, and specific attributes. Some gods are associated with social and political units such as clans and villages. The number of gods found within a religious system varies from one to more than a thousand.

BOX 9.1

Christian Demonic Exorcism in the United States

Possession as a source of illness that requires exorcism for healing is found cross-culturally, including in the United States. As is discussed in this chapter, the Christian belief in demons and demonic exorcism is taken directly from the New Testament. There we learn that Satan and his demons harass, torment, and possess humans. This possession sometimes is shown in new skills or strength that the person then has (by virtue of the demon). In general, possession was described as an illness, and much of Jesus' healing ministry involved performing demonic exorcism. In the New Testament, Jesus is able to perform exorcisms by merely demanding that the demons leave; his disciples do the same in the name of Jesus. ("And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not" [Luke 4:33–37]).

In his book *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty,* Michael Cuneo argues that the phenomenon of Christian demonic exorcism is both influenced by and reflects wider American culture. For example, he cites the great influence of the book and later film *The*

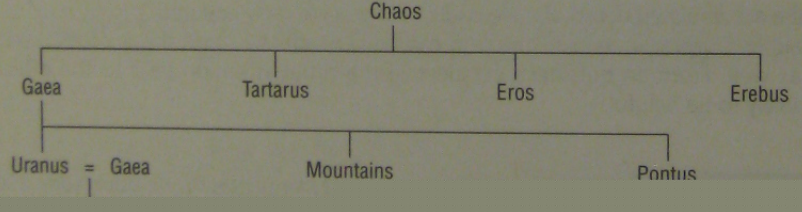
Types of Gods

Within a particular religious system, the gods as a collective make up a **pantheon**. Usually, the gods within the pantheon form a hierarchy with a **supreme god** at the top. They are related to one another in various ways, often making up a large family unit characterized by family relationships, such as those seen in the Greek pantheon (Figure 9.1). The community of the gods often mirrors human society. If the human society is highly hierarchical and warlike, so is the society of the gods.

In many ways a pantheon resembles a human society, often with a division of labor. Specific gods are associated with the forces of nature, human fertility and the human life cycle, economic activities, and war. Specialized deities are called **attribute gods**. The relative importance of such gods depends largely on the importance of various activities within human society. For example, if a society is very warlike, the war gods may be featured prominently in religious rituals.

The gods within a pantheon have specific spheres of influence and control. Sometimes there is a relatively small number of gods, each controlling a rather large slice of human activity. Sometimes there are a great many gods, each highly specialized. For example, instead of a single god associated with agriculture, the Roman pantheon had a rather lengthy list of gods who were responsible for very specific activities within the farming cycle (Table 9.1).

Although there is a tremendous variety of gods that can be listed, certain types seem to appear over and over as we move from society to society. **Creator gods** are responsible for the creation of the physical earth and the plants and animals that live on it. Creator gods can be very powerful deities and often occupy the top rung of a hierarchy of gods. Creation is not necessarily the work of a single god. Often various aspects of creation are divided among several gods, or, usually after the creation of the physical earth, different gods are responsible for the creation of



Gods and Society

Émile Durkheim first proposed the idea that religious symbolism marks as sacred important institutions of human society that are necessary for the group's survival.[5] Durkheim's approach is a functionalist one, seeing religious and other cultural phenomena as serving some essential purpose in maintaining the society. In his analysis of gods, he points out that the powers commonly attributed to gods are similar to those of society: creating sacred times and spaces, designating moral rules and punishing offenders, existing above all individuals, requiring sacrifice. Values that we learn in society, such as obligation, loyalty, respect, and hierarchy, are mirrored in our relationship with supernatural beings.

The imagery that is used for gods, such as their anthropomorphic nature, is taken from social categories and statuses. Gods are rulers, fathers, mothers, daughters, and sons. We relate to them through social interactions in ways learned in society. Whatever the themes are in a particular culture will be reflected in the nature and domains of the gods. The values and concerns of a culture are projected onto the gods themselves, and the behavior of humans toward the gods is an expression of the social behaviors valued by that culture.

In a similar vein, British anthropologist Robin Horton suggests that supernatural beings function to extend the realm of social relations.[6] Again, the focus is on gods as anthropomorphic beings who reflect human behavior. Horton suggests that the behavior of the gods provides a model for humans. He explored his ideas by looking at various African religions. Although a high god is found in almost all of these religions, the nature of this god ranges from an otiose god to one who is in active control of the universe. Horton thought that two variables explain much of this variation.

The first variable is how often people in that society encounter other peoples and the world in general outside their own local community. Horton thinks that lesser gods are associated with the interpretation of events occurring in the immediate area while a high god is more important for interpreting that immediate world in relation to the greater world beyond the local area. With this greater level of contact, issues that people face are more likely to be seen as being part of just being human. Thus the greater the contact a society has with the larger world, the greater the need for a high god who has univ-

relationships between children and their parents.[8] This can especially be seen in the nature of

TABLE 9.2 Some of the Yoruba Orisha

Orisha	Domain	Characteristics	Symbolic Representation
Esu-Elegba	"Guardian of the Threshold," first god to be addressed in ritual; intermediary between people, their ancestors, and the gods	Unpredictable, trickster	Hooked beaded stick; red and black
Obatala	King of the *orisha*	Ethical, merciful, patient, composed	White sheet, white beaded cane; white
Ogun	Rules over metal, technology, and war	Aggressive, bold	Beaded machete, metal implements; green and dark blue
Orisa Oko	Agricultural deity, judges antisocial behavior, disease, and poverty, interprets Ifa divination		Iron beaded staffs, flutes
Osanyin	Forest deity and god of herbalistic medicine		Represented as a puppet with a squeaky voice, iron staff topped with birds; colors of the forest
Osoosi	Hunter god	Quick, strong, aggressive, intellectual	Hunter's hat, powder horns, bow and arrow; green and blue
Osun	Goddess of freshwater streams; sustains life	Youngest *orisha*, beautiful and vain, deceitful	Round fan, crown and beaded apron; crystal yellow gold to opaque chartreuse
Sango	God of thunder and lightning	Proud, aggressive, quick tempered	Double-bladed axe, gourd rattle, zigzag motif representing lightning
Yemoja	Ruler of the river Ogun, mother of many *orisha*, symbol of motherhood	Calm, serious, dignified	Round fan, crown; crystal white and crystal blue or green

including nature gods, deified heroes and ancestors, and technological gods. An important god in this class is Lidum, a deity who taught the Ifugao many of their rituals.

Barton lists 168 "Paybackables." An example is the deities that are involved with the activity of weaving. They include "Separator of Seeds from Cotton," "Separator of Defective, Lumped Fibers," "Fluffer," "Spinner," "Draw Out of Thread on Spindle Bob," "Black Dyer," "Red Dyer," "Yellow Dyer," "Winder into Ball," "Weaver's First Helper Who Receives the Ball and Passes It Back and Forth," "Second Helper Who Passes Ball around the End Stick," "Scrutinizer (who sees that the job of setting up the loom is done right)," and—well, you get the general idea.

A rather interesting class of deities is the "Convincers." These gods bend a person's will to that of the person who invokes them. This process is called by English-speaking Ifugao

convincing. To fulfill religious obligations, an Ifugao must borrow things to sacrifice. The loan is usually very difficult to get repaid, and the Ifugao have developed many behaviors, including bullying and bluffing, to get the loan repaid. For example, if a debtor has publicly refused to pay a debt and therefore cannot pay it without losing face, the one to whom the debt is owed will call on the god Amobok, who will weaken the debtor's resolve and get him to pay back the debt in secret, thereby saving face.

There are many other important classes of deities. These include gods of reproduction, messenger deities, gods associated with various illnesses, gods associated with death, divination deities, gods of war, guardians of property, and many, many more.

Goddesses

Goddesses have been important figures in many religious systems. Some scholars believe that early human religions centered on fertility, a lunar cycle as opposed to a solar one, and the worship of a goddess. This is largely speculative and based on findings of small carvings of female figures with exaggerated characteristics thought to be connected to fertility (Figure 9.2).

Although matriarchy, or rule by women, may never have existed in the past, the role of women in these prehistoric foraging societies was almost certainly greater than that in contemporary agricultural and industrial societies.

Some believe that goddess worship continued in Europe until a few thousand years before the Common Era. At this time the Indo-Europeans invaded from the East and brought with them a belief in male gods and the exploitation of nature. Some argue that goddess worship and the new god worship gradually combined to produce the polytheistic pagan religions of the Romans, Greeks, and Celts.

With the development of the monotheistic religions, discussed later in the chapter, the goddess was further suppressed, as these latter religions conceived of god in largely male terms. Although all three of the monotheistic religions contained some egalitarian sentiments in their origins and texts, all have also been interpreted at one time or another in very misogynistic terms.

Three important goddesses are Ishtar of the ancient Near East, Isis of ancient Egypt, and Kali in Hinduism. We will also discuss the Virgin Mary in Catholicism, although her classification as a goddess is certainly debatable and comes entirely from an etic perspective. Goddess worship has also seen a resurgence with the growth of the Wiccan religion, which will be discussed in Chapter 11.

ISHTAR (ANCIENT NEAR EAST). The goddess Ishtar was worshipped for thousands of years in Mesopotamia. Seen as both invincible in battle and a source of fertility, Ishtar was one of the paramount national deities.

In the natural environment of Mesopotamia, winds, rain, drought, and flood were all common. This contributed to a worldview in which these inconsistencies in nature were seen as being a reflection of violent conflicts among the gods; both the environment and the gods were seen as being unpredictable. The only way to ensure adequate food, victory in warfare, health, and so on was proper performance of rituals and sacrifices for the gods and goddesses.

Among the gods and goddesses in the pantheon, Ishtar is supreme in her power over fate, as recounted in the Epic of Gilgamesh. In this story Ishtar made sexual advances toward King Gilgamesh, which he rejected. In response, Ishtar asked the supreme god, An, to send the bull of heaven to destroy Gilgamesh and his city, Uruk. Ishtar threatened that if she did not get her way, she would release the dead from the netherworld. In her role as a fertility goddess, she also promised that she would ensure that there would be enough food to eat after the bull's destruction.

Sexuality was an important aspect of Ishtar, as seen in the sacred marriage rites. The rites took place between the king and an **avatar** of Ishtar, probably her high priestess. Unlike the Egyptian pharaohs, who were themselves seen as divine, this king was seen as a mortal who was the intermediary between the community and the gods. His relationship with Ishtar was seen as the source of his power and the guarantee of his success. This union was explicitly sexual, although it resulted not in offspring, but in the fertility of the land and success in battle.

ISIS (ANCIENT EGYPT). Women occupied a relatively favorable position in ancient Egyptian society. The pharaoh was seen as the son of the sun god, and his queen was not only consort to the divine king but the mother of the divine prince. Women were also important in the religious realm, the pantheon containing a number of prominent goddesses.

Isis was probably the most important deity of the Egyptian pantheon for the average Egyptian. She was called the "Great Mother" and the "Queen of Heaven" and was associated

FIGURE 9.3 ***The Hindu Goddess Kali.*** A fierce goddess, Kali destroys those who do evil, but also brings wisdom and transformation to her devotees.

set above the saints and, as the mother of God's son, was seen as only a little lower than God. She played an important role as an intermediary between people and God and Jesus. This was not true of the Protestant religions, which have tended to minimize the place of Mary. In fact, devotion to Mary was one of the major issues of the Protestant Reformation.

In the book of Revelation a passage that is interpreted as referring to Mary describes her as "a woman, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1). This woman is also said to be stepping on a serpent, which is seen as symbolic of Mary overcoming the curse brought on humans by the first woman, Eve. In the language of Revelation, Mary is the "Queen of Heaven."

[illegible] different ways. First is the celebration, not only of

religion away from the Temple. From this grew the idea of a more pure monotheism, that Yahweh is the only God. In many ways the monotheism of the Jews was different from the pagan religions around it. The other gods of the ancient Middle East, such as Baal and Marduk, were not involved in the everyday lives of the people. The God of Israel, however, was an important power in human lives and was intimately involved in the ongoing history of the Jewish people. The pagan religions were generally tribal, limited to a specific people and a specific place. The God of Israel promised that he would protect Jacob and his people when they left Canaan and traveled to a strange new land. This conception of God was very pragmatic.

The way in which God is characterized changes over time in the Tanakh. In the story of Abraham, God, described in a very anthropomorphic way, visited Abraham in his tent and shared a meal with him. Later in time, God appeared to Moses in the much more dramatic form of a burning bush and insisted on distance. Later prophets were visited by angelic messengers, or sometimes they heard a divine inner voice. In the later rabbinic tradition God was presented as even more transcendent and even less anthropomorphic.

The early stories of God depict Him as a very partisan tribal deity, often cruel and violent. He demanded the sacrifice of Abraham's son Isaac, and He visited horrific plagues on the Egyptians. Later He was transformed into a symbol of transcendence and compassion, and in all three of the monotheistic religions discussed in this section, God became an inspiration for social justice.

In the years after the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in 70 C.E., the rabbis described God as an essentially subjective experience. To this day, Judaism considers theological ideas about God to be a private matter for the individual, for any official doctrine would limit the essential mystery of God. The rabbis also began the important tradition of interpretation and commentaries on religious texts. Thus there is a fair amount of room in Judaism for individual opinions on such important matters as the nature of God.

CHRISTIANITY. Out of Judaism came the new religion of Christianity. Jews at the time of Jesus, under Roman rule, were expecting a Messiah. However, as now passionate monotheists, they expected this Messiah to be human, a descendant of King David, not divine. The term *son of God* had been used previously in Jewish stories and expressed intimacy with God; it was not to be taken literally. Although few Jews of the time accepted Jesus as the Messiah, many other people ultimately would.

The story of Christianity is essentially the story of Jesus. The Gospel of John describes Jesus as the eternal Son of God and the word of God made flesh. Jesus himself never claimed to be divine, and it was only after his death that his followers seem to have come to this conclusion. This did not happen immediately. It was not until the fourth century C.E. that the doctrine that Jesus had been God in human form (the Incarnation) was established.

For Christians Jesus became the mediator between humans and God. They believed that

although he remains fully present in and to his believers. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to his followers after his death. The Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost, is the spirit of God, guiding and sustaining the faithful.

The concept of the Trinity caused many problems for the ostensibly monotheistic Christians. Under pressure from a hostile Roman world to explain how Christians could worship three divine beings but still consider themselves monotheistic, Christian apologists put forward several interpretations. In general, Christians settled on an interpretation of a single divine substance manifested in three personas. This view is expressed in the Athanasian Creed: "The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods, but one God." In Western Christianity, however, the three distinct personas have generally been stressed over the unifying substance.

ISLAM. The story of Islam begins with the story of Mohammad, a member of the Quraysh tribe, which in the seventh century C.E. had recently settled in Mecca after having previously lived as nomadic herdsmen on the Arabian steppes. This act of settling in one place drastically altered their lifestyle, and new values started replacing the old. Mecca was also the location of the Kaaba, an ancient and massive cube-shaped shrine. Most Arabs believed that the Kaaba was

Atheism

Just as the statement "I believe in God" has meaning only in context, so does the concept of **atheism.** For example, early Christians and Muslims were considered atheists by the larger society in which they lived for refusing to recognize the existing pantheon of gods. In the Qur'an an unbeliever is somebody who is ungrateful to God and refuses to honor Him. Atheism has historically meant not accepting the current conception of God.

In Europe it was only at the end of the sixteenth century that the term *atheist* began to be widely used. It was the time of great conflicts between Protestants and Catholics and the proliferation of many Christian sects. Rumors abounded of people—atheists—who denied the existence of God. These were much like the rumors of witchcraft, which we will discuss in Chapter 10.

In reality atheism, as we conceive of it today, was highly unlikely—perhaps even impossible—for people of the time. In sixteenth-century life, religion and the Church were ubiquitous. They dominated life and were part of nearly every activity. In these conditions it is hard to imagine someone gaining enough of an outsider perspective to question God and religion. Even if someone had managed to do so, this person would have found no support for this perspective in the science or philosophy of the time. The term *atheist* was used as an insult, to describe someone who did not agree with you about the nature of God. No one would actually use the term to describe himself or herself. It would not be until the end of the eighteenth century that a few Europeans would find it possible to deny the existence of God.

The scientific developments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were important to the development of atheism. By the start of the seventeenth century, leading theologians argued the existence of God on entirely rational grounds. When these arguments did not hold up well under the new science, the existence of God began to be questioned. In large part it was the way in which people conceived of the nature of God that made Him vulnerable to this attack. God was seen as a fact of life that could be examined in much the same way that the natural world was.

Another issue was a new emphasis on a literal understanding of the Bible in both Catholic and Protestant traditions. Again, these literal interpretations made the texts vulnerable to questioning from the new scientific perspective. The heliocentric theory of Copernicus and Galileo was condemned by the Roman Catholic Church not because the theory endangered belief in God, but because it contradicted the scriptures. Many years later, the discoveries of Lyell and Darwin would call into question the biblical account of creation.

With the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment came new ideas of science and progress. Enlightenment was seen as achievable by people on their own, without relying on the traditions of the Church or revelation from God. However, most of the philosophers of the Enlightenment did not reject the idea of God outright, just the conceptions of a cruel God who threatens people with eternal damnation. They believed in a god, but not the God of the Bible. However, a few people truly were beginning the trend away from God, and by the end of the century there were philosophers who were proud to call themselves atheists. There was also an idea that science, which was the foundation for questioning God, would ultimately replace religion.

Science has not been the only factor in the growth of atheism. The challenge of horrific historical events such as the Holocaust has also played a role. Some people believe that growing atheism is just the natural result of living in a more secular society.

Just as there are different kinds of beliefs in god, there are different kinds of atheists. Some distinguish between weak atheism (disbelief in any god) and strong atheism (denial of the existence of any god). Another approach is **agnosticism**, which is the idea that the question of the existence of a god is unsolvable, unprovable.

While the numbers of people with no belief in a god have grown dramatically in Europe over the years, it is interesting to note that the same phenomenon has not occurred in the United States. Although church attendance and membership in traditional religious denominations have fallen, the vast majority of people in the United States still say that they believe in God, whatever they mean by that.

CONCLUSION

The functioning of the human mind leads us into seeing the world as being the result of the actions of various types of beings. Our world is populated with actors who we see as responsible for the events in our lives, especially those that cause us pain and misery. Some of these actors are humans with supernatural powers—magicians and witches, for example. Others are not human, but are anthropomorphic supernatural beings—spirits and gods. The actions of these supernatural beings explain the operation of our world. They provide us with an explanation for what befalls us and provide the basis of action to counter such negative events through ritual activity.

The similarity between gods and people is striking. Gods resemble us in appearance, thoughts, and actions. They have human emotions and display the best and worst of human behavior. The structure of human society is a model for that of the gods in ways that are both simple and complex. Of course, the powers possessed by supernatural beings go far beyond those of humans. Gods are creators and destroyers. As such, gods are part of the explanatory system for how the world works. The existence of gods answers many of the big questions in life: How did the world begin? Why are we here? The existence of spirit beings answers many of the smaller ones: Why do we get sick? What goes bump in the night?

Summary

Gods and spirits are supernatural beings that generally do not have human origins. The distinction between gods and spirits is to some degree arbitrary. Spirits are less powerful than gods, are more localized, and are frequently collections of nonindividualized supernatural beings that are not given specific names and identities. Examples include the leprechauns of Ireland, the jinn of the Middle East, and the angels and demons of the monotheistic religions. Spirits include guardian spirits, ancestral spirits, and shamans' spirit helpers. Spirits live in the human world, interacting with humans. They may provide protection, success, and luck but also are blamed for minor mishaps. Spirits often reside in natural and human-made objects. Places of special beauty or unusual character may be inhabited by spirits.

Gods are more powerful than spirits. They control major forces of nature, such as the wind, rain, and fertility. Gods are anthropomorphic, with names, origins, and specific attributes. They are born, marry, and sometimes die; they love and lust; they are wise and dull, loving and hateful, generous and miserly; some are sympathetic to human beings, others are hostile. A hierarchy of gods makes up a pantheon, usually with a supreme god at the top. Many types of gods can be recognized, including creator gods, otiose gods, trickster gods, and attribute gods.

Theorists have proposed that the nature of the gods in a society mirrors important cultural elements, such as that group's social structure. Horton proposed that the importance of a high god in African religions was related to increased contact with the outside world and the importance of achieved status over ascribed status. Swanson tested the functionalist ideas of Durkheim and found that religious hierarchy was more likely to be found in a society that also

had a decision-making hierarchy that contained at least three different levels. He also found that the number of attribute gods related to amount of specialization. Psychosocial anthropologists believe that humans project qualities of important figures such as parents onto the gods.

Some scholars believe that the earliest human religions centered on fertility, a lunar cycle as opposed to a solar one, and the worship of a goddess. Examples of goddesses are Ishtar of the ancient Near East, Isis of ancient Egypt, and Kali from Hinduism. From an etic viewpoint, the role of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism has some characteristics of a goddess. With the development of the monotheistic religions the goddess was suppressed, as these religions conceived of god in largely male terms.

Polytheistic religions recognize many deities. The more familiar monotheistic religions believe in a single omnipotent and omniscient God. Judaism believes that the Jews have been chosen to enter into a special relationship with God. Out of Judaism came Christianity. The story of Christianity is essentially the story of Jesus—God who became human to lead people back to God. In Islam, Allah was believed to be identical to the God of the Jews and Christians, religions that were seen as having strayed from the authentic monotheism of Abraham, which Islam would seek to restore.

Atheism has historically meant not accepting the conception of the divine that is found in a particular society at a particular time. It was not until the end of the eighteenth century that atheism took on its present meaning of denying the existence of God.

Suggested Readings

Michael Cuneo, *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).
[A look at exorcism, largely Christian evangelical, in the United States.]

Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).
[Dawkins presents his arguments for atheism.]

Felicitas D. Goodman, *How about Demons? Possession and Exorcism in the Modern World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
[A look at possession in different cultures, including a discussion of the role of altered states of consciousness.]

Michael Shermer, *How We Believe: The Search for God in the Age of Science* (New York: Freeman, 2000).
[A look at reasons why people say they believe in God.]

Fiction

Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).
[A story of murder and conspiracy that focuses on the importance of the feminine divine.]

Neil Gaiman, *American Gods* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001).
[Old gods battle new ones for control in America.]

Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002).
[Set in South Carolina in the 1960s, a young girl's life is influenced by three beekeeping sisters and a Black Madonna.]

Suggested Websites

http://godchecker.com
A database of all known gods.

www.atheists.org
The website of the American Atheists.

www.amnh.org/exhibitions/meeting_god/index.html
Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion from the American Museum of Natural History.

www.religioustolerance.org/god_devel.htm
Various ideas about God from Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance.

www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm
Catholic beliefs about God.

http://www.marypages.com/
Apparitions of the Virgin Mary.

CHAPTER

10

Witchcraft

One of the most interesting topics in the anthropology of religion is **witchcraft**. However, witchcraft is not a single, unified concept. When anthropologists speak of witchcraft, they generally refer to individuals who have an innate ability to do evil. A witch does not depend on ritual to achieve his or her evil ends but simply wills misfortune to occur. In this sense witchcraft is clearly different from sorcery. (Of course, there is nothing to prevent a witch from using magic, but this would lie outside the definition of witchcraft.) In some cultures witchcraft can be unconscious and unintentional; one can be a witch and not even know it.

Although in our culture we tend to think of witches as females, traditionally both sexes have been accused of witchcraft. Witchcraft accusations reflect underlying social tensions in a society. Individuals who exhibit antisocial behavior and people in relationships characterized by conflict are likely targets. Along these lines, cultures in which witches are considered primarily to be women will tend to exhibit tension between the sexes.

The concept of individuals with such propensities for evil is found in a wide variety of areas, including New Guinea, Southeast Asia, the Americas, and Europe. However, the best-developed discussions of witchcraft in the anthropological literature describing witchcraft in small-scale [illegible] are those of witchcraft in [illegible] societies. In these societies witchcraft is a very

THE CONCEPT OF WITCHCRAFT IN SMALL-SCALE SOCIETIES

The idea of witchcraft as an evil force bringing misfortune to members of a community is found in a great number of societies throughout the world. In these societies witchcraft is evil; there are no good witches. Unlike sorcerers, who perform magic rituals to achieve their evil ends, witches simply will death and destruction.

The power of a witch is clearly a supernatural power. Some witches fly through the air. Others can change their outward physical appearance to that of an animal. Witches have personal characteristics that are the antithesis of those that characterize a good, moral person. Witches might practice cannibalism and incest; they show hatred, jealousy, and greed. Thus they become personifications of all that is evil in a society. Witchcraft beliefs become a way of objectifying antisocial behavioral traits.

Witchcraft among the Azande

The Azande are a large cultural group living in southern Sudan and northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). The Azande of the southern Sudan were residing within the British colony of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in the early part of the twentieth century. Between 1926 and 1930 the British anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard made three expeditions to Zandeland. These experiences led to the publication in 1937 of Evans-Pritchard's analysis of witchcraft in his important ethnography *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande.*[1]

One of the factors that makes the study of Zande witchcraft so important is that among the Azande, witchcraft is an everyday topic of conversation, and people will discuss witchcraft in great detail with an outside observer. Therefore Evans-Pritchard had access to a great deal of information.

THE ZANDE BELIEF IN WITCHCRAFT. As with many African peoples, the Azande believe that witchcraft, or *mangu,* is something that exists within the body of a witch. The Azande actually describe this something as a physical substance. It is described in many ways. For example, it might be "an oval blackish swelling . . . in which various small objects are sometimes found."[2] It appears to be associated with the intestines or perhaps the liver. And how are the Azande able to describe witchcraft substances? It is because in the days before the British established control over the area, an autopsy was performed on people who had been accused of witchcraft when alive, to determine whether they were truly witches or not.

However, because witchcraft is inherited, an autopsy of an accused witch would also prove that a particular living person, related to the deceased, was or was not a witch. *Mangu* is thought to be passed down from parent to child of the same sex—from father to son and from mother to daughter. Therefore if a man were proven to possess witchcraft substance, this conclusion would extend to that man's father, sons, brothers, and so on. However, the Azande rarely have a theoretical interest in witchcraft. What is important is whether a person at a particular point in time is acting as a witch toward a specific person. A person can possess *mangu* and yet not act as a witch. (As we shall see shortly, the identification of witches is more commonly done through divination, which was discussed in Chapter 7.)

Although witchcraft is contained within the physical body, its action is psychic. The psychic aspect of *mangu* is the soul of witchcraft. It usually, but not always, leaves the physical body of the witch at night, when the victim is asleep, and is directed by the witch into the body of the victim. As it moves, it shines with a bright light that can be seen by anyone during the nighttime. However, during the day it can be seen only by religious specialists.

Witchcraft among the Navaho

Whereas Zande witches are born with *mangu,* in other cultures the power of witchcraft is one that is sought. Again, immoral and antisocial behavioral traits are associated with witchcraft. They drive the individual to do whatever he or she must do to gain power that eventually will satisfy this emotional need. As our example we will examine witchcraft beliefs among the Navaho of the American Southwest. (It should be noted that although we are using the ethnographic present, it has been many decades since the last documented case of witch killing among the Navaho.)

In contrast with the Azande, the Navaho are very reluctant to discuss witchcraft. Many deny its existence, although this might be because admitting to knowledge of witchcraft is seen as suspicious. Yet witchcraft beliefs are found throughout Navaho society. In contrast with the Azande, Navaho witches are individuals who seek to be initiated into the Witchery Way.

Witchcraft is generally associated with immoral and antisocial behavior such as greed, vengeance, and envy. Greedy witches obtain wealth by robbing graves. Another method is to pair up with another witch. One witch causes the illness, and the other witch attempts to "cure" the victim; the fee is then split between the two witches. Witches are thought to meet in caves at night, where they practice incest and cannibalism, have intercourse with the dead, and perform rituals to kill victims. Witchcraft beliefs act in many ways to enforce social norms. For example, if you do not care for your parents properly, they can become witches.

Witchcraft Reflects Human Culture

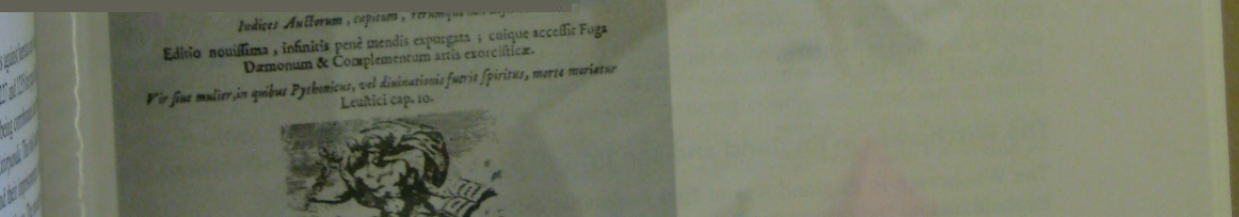
The study of Zande witchcraft demonstrated that witchcraft beliefs and accusation reflect interpersonal behavior between people in stressful situations and that stressful behavior is frequently a recurring situation in particular social relationships. Thus, as we saw in our example, the interpersonal relationship between co-wives is potentially a difficult relationship, and this stress is manifested in the form of witchcraft accusations. This point is clearly illustrated when we compare the systems of witchcraft belief in two different but related societies: the Nupe and Gwari of West Africa.

The Nupe and the Gwari are neighboring societies in the Guinea Coast culture area. They live in similar habitats and interact socially and economically with one another. Their social organizations are very similar; they even speak closely related languages. And many aspects of

Some have argued that this was part of the larger persecution of pagan religious practices. Christians were arguing that Jesus was the Son of God, and a large part of their argument was based on the miracles that he performed. Skeptics of the day were likely to counter with the argument that Jesus was merely another sorcerer, performing magic. So for Christians the only legitimate magic became the magic performed by Jesus; all other magic was the work of the Devil. Magic and witchcraft became not just crimes against society, but **heresy**—crimes against God.

The Christian theology of the time argued that pagan magic and religion were all the work of the Devil, part of his plan to lure people away from the truth of Christianity. The pagan gods and goddesses were thus redefined by Christians as servants of Satan. However, at the level of popular religion many of the pagan beliefs and gods were absorbed into the Christian religion.

societies, witches generally represent all that is evil and antisocial. In this case, witches were [illegible] to engage in sacrificial infanticide and cannibalism, and to desecrate


Iudices Auctorum, copiam, [illegible]
Editio nouissima, infinitis penè mendis expurgata; cuique accessit Fuga Dæmonum & Complementum artis exorcisticæ.
Vir siue mulier, in quibus Pythonicus, vel diuinationis fuerit spiritus, morte moriatur
Leuitici cap. 10.

included having intercourse with the Devil himself. Witches were also typically believed to shift shapes, fly through the air, and make magical ointments. The *Malleus* also stated that witches were more likely to be women than men, something we will return to later. The *Malleus* spelled out what to do with a witch: All witches must be arrested, convicted, and executed. It is important to note that even people who spoke out against the Witchcraze did not challenge the actual existence of witches. To do so at this time would have been tantamount to declaring oneself an atheist.

People who were accused of witchcraft were interrogated to obtain a confession. The questions they were asked presumed their guilt. For example, common questions included where and when they met with the Devil. The question of whether or not they had done such a thing was never asked. Torture was a common means of gaining a confession. In 1628 a man named Johannes Junius was executed as a witch. What is unusual about this case is that he was able to smuggle a letter out of prison to his daughter before he died. What follows is a portion of that letter:[6]

> Many hundred thousand good-nights, dearly beloved daughter Veronica. Innocent have I come into prison, innocent have I been tortured, innocent must I die. For whoever comes into the witch prison must . . . be tortured until he invents something out of his head. . . . When I was the first time put to the torture, Dr. Braun, Dr. Kötzendörffer, and two strange doctors were there. The Dr. Braun asks me, "Kinsman, how come you here?" I answer, "Through falsehood, through misfortune." "Hear you," he retorts, "you are a witch; will you confess it voluntarily? If not, we'll bring in witnesses and the executioner for you." I said, "I am no witch, I have a pure conscience in the matter; if there are a thousand witnesses, I am not anxious." [The witnesses were brought forward.] And then came also—God in the highest heaven have mercy—the executioner, and put the thumb-screws on me, both hands bound together, so that the blood ran out at the nails and everywhere, so that for four weeks I could not use my hands, as you can see from the writing. . . . Thereafter, they first stripped me, bound my hands behind me, and drew me up in the [strappado]. Then I thought heaven and earth were at an end; eight times did they draw me up and let me fall again, so that I suffered terrible agony. . . . And so I made my confession . . . but it was all a lie.

As the sixteenth century progressed, the Witchcraze only increased in intensity. Religious conflict, popular movements, and wars during the Reformation exacerbated social tensions, which were then reflected in witchcraft accusations. The Witchcraze did not decline until the late 1600s and early 1700s.

The Witchcraze in England and the United States

The Witchcraze in England was at first somewhat different from that in continental Europe. England had no Inquisition, no Roman law, and only a weak tradition of heresy—all of which had contributed to the Witchcraze elsewhere. There was no English translation of the *Malleus Maleficarum* until modern times. English witchcraft remained closer to the idea of sorcery, with an emphasis on the power of witches to place hexes and curses. In the 1500s, English witches were not believed to fly, conduct orgies, or make pacts with the Devil. Instead, they harmed livestock, caused diseases, and hurt infants and children. The first statutes against witchcraft in

BOX 10.1

The Evil Eye

Although not usually thought of as witchcraft, belief in the evil eye has many of the characteristics associated with witchcraft. The power of the evil eye, like that of witchcraft, lies within the body of the individual, who might or might not be aware of it. This belief is found primarily in India, the Near East, parts of Europe, and Mexico.

A person with the evil eye is able to cause illness or some other type of misfortune simply by looking at or praising someone or something. This is especially the case with babies, and in many societies it is considered bad form to praise or say something complimentary about a child, or the child could become ill and perhaps die. The concept is associated with envy, and people with the evil eye are jealous over the success or good luck of others.

One can avoid the evil eye by wearing charms that ward away the danger and by the recitation of certain formulas. When complimenting a person or praising a person, one makes sure to begin and end the compliment with a special formula. Spitting or particular hand gestures are also used to protect one against the malignant power of the evil eye. Another strategy is to conceal one's good fortune and avoid looking prosperous.

The idea of the evil eye varies from society to society. In the Mayan region of Mexico, illness may be caused by *ojo,* or the evil eye, by a man or animal simply looking at a child.[a] People with the evil eye are dangerous, and one must deal with them with great care. One can recognize these individuals by a mole, a prominent vein, or a mark between the eyebrows. Cures may be effected by some type of contact with the person who has the evil eye. For example, a man who has brought about sickness in a child might be asked to place the child's finger in his mouth or rub some of his saliva on the child's mouth.

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[a]R. Redfield and A. Villa Rojas, *Chan Kom. A Maya Village* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1962).

BOX 10.2

methods used by investigators have largely been discredited. Although favoring the prosecution perspective at first, even the media at the time eventually labeled these cases as witch hunts.

CONCLUSION

Fear of the existence of supernaturally evil individuals appears to be universal. And who should we fear most as potential evildoers? People who stand out, people with whom we have existing conflicts.

[The story of a young boy growing up in New Mexico in the 1940s dealing with conflicts between religious traditions including the presence of witches.]

Elenore Smith Bowen, *Return to Laughter* (New York: Doubleday, 1954).

[An anthropological novel tracing the adventures of a female anthropologist working in West Africa written under a pen name by Laura Bohannan based on work among the Tiv of Nigeria.]

Suggested Websites

www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/salem.htm
The Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692.

www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/witches1.html
Medieval Sourcebook: Fifteenth-Century Witchcraft Documents.

www.malleusmaleficarum.org
The text of the *Malleus Maleficarum.*

www.churchofsatan.org
The Church of Satan website.

for this purpose. Over time the slaves became vaguely aware of the most basic tenets of Catholicism, but they continued to practice their African religions.

In 1790 the feared slave revolt came to pass. After a prolonged struggle Haiti, the first black republic in the New World, declared its independence in 1804. The establishment of a republic formed of ex-slaves was not popular with its neighbors, and diplomatic recognition was withheld for some time. As a result Haiti became isolated from the rest of the world. The Vatican recalled its priests in 1804 and broke off relations with Haiti; Catholic clergy did not return until 1860. It was during this period of isolation that Vodou developed.

Haiti is nominally a Catholic country, although many Protestant churches have been established. Yet Vodou remains strong, and the majority of professed Catholics—and indeed many Protestants—also practice Vodou.

VODOU BELIEFS. Vodou is in many ways a West African religion. It worships many of the same deities, and Vodou rituals closely resemble African rituals. Haitian Vodou has a pantheon of deities called *lwa,* which are similar to the *orisha* of the Yoruba (see Chapter 9). Altars are constructed containing objects that are infused with spirits, and offerings and sacrifices are made to appease the *lwa* (Figure 11.1). Dance and music play major roles in Vodou ritual.

FIGURE 11.1 *Vodou Altar.* This replica of a Vodou altar was set up as part of the exhibit "Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou" at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Vodou priest Sauveur St. Cyr is seen in front of a painting of the *lwa* Azaka/St. Isidore, the *lwa* of agriculture.

The *lwa* can be divided into several pantheons. The two most important are the Rada and the Petwo *nanchon*, or nations. The Rada *nanchon* consists of deities that would be very familiar to a Yoruba. These are African deities and are thought to be very ancient. In contrast are the Petwo *lwas*. They are aggressive and assertive, born out of the slave experience. Many first appeared during the period of isolation in the early nineteenth century. Another important group of *lwas* are those associated with death.

Table 11.1 lists some of the more important *lwa*. However, the situation is much more complicated than is shown in the table, because many deities appear in different manifestations. Each deity has a particular personality, domains over which he or she rules, and particular symbols. These symbols include not only physical objects and artistic motifs, but also particular

TABLE 11.1 The *Lwa* of Haitian Vodou

Lwa	Role	Symbols	Seen as	Colors
Legba	As the guardian of the threshold between humans and the supernatural, Legba is the first *lwa* to be greeted in ritual	Crutches, pipe, rooster	St. Peter	Orange, yellow, red
Danbala and Ayida Wèdo	*Lwa* of rainfall and fertility, Danbala is the oldest of the *lwa;* his wife is the rainbow spirit	Serpent, rainbow, lightning bolts, bishop's attire	St. Patrick	White
Agwe	Protector of ships at sea	Ritual boat, shells, admiral's attire	St. Ulrich holding a fish	Green
Ezili Dantò	*Lwa* of fertility and motherhood; protector of mothers	Heart, knife, black pig	The Black Madonna	Multicolor
Ezili Freda	*Lwa* of love and luxury	Hearts, flowers, doves	Madonna of Sorrows	Pink, white
Gede	*Lwa* of death; healer, trickster deity	Cross, skull and cross bones, top hat, sun glasses missing one lens	St. Gabriel	Black, purple
Azaka	*Lwa* of agriculture	Straw hat, straw bag, pipe	St. Isidore	Green, white, denim
Lasirèn	Female *lwa* of the sea; brings luck and money; patron deity of musicians	Mermaids, fish, mirror	St. Martha with a dragon	Blue, white
Ogou	*Lwa* of war and military might; protector of cars	Fire, iron, swords	St. James	Red and blue of Haitian flag

ways of speaking and music and dance movements. Each *lwa* is known to be partial to certain foods that are used as offerings. In general, the Rada *lwa* like things that are "cool," such as candies and sweet drinks; the Petwo *lwa* like things that are "hot," such as strong drinks like rum and spicy foods.

An example of syncretism is the association of particular *lwa* with Catholic saints and manifestations of the Virgin. Symbolism in the **chromolithographs** (colored posters) used by early priests who attempted to bring Christianity to the slaves was seen as symbolic of the deities. Perhaps the oldest and most venerated of the deities is Danbala, the Rada serpent deity. His domain is rain, fecundity, and wisdom. Danbala is depicted as Saint Patrick, who is pictured on the chromolithographs with snakes at his feet. In Vodou art, Danbala is often seen with his wife Ayida Wèdo, the rainbow serpent.

Santeria

Other religious movements, similar in form and function to Vodou, developed throughout the Caribbean, Brazil, and other parts of the New World where slaves were imported to work the large plantations. Santeria developed in Cuba from a fusion of West African religions, primarily Yoruba and Spanish Catholicism.

Slavery lasted longer in Cuba than in Haiti. Independence of this last Spanish colony in the New World occurred, with the aid of the United States, in 1898. By this time, there were a large number of freed slaves as well as communities of freed slaves in remote mountainous areas and various mutual aid societies and social clubs in urban areas. Santeria developed out of these societies, and today it has spread to other areas in the New World, including the United States. In the United States in areas with large Hispanic populations, such as Los Angeles, the religion is most often seen in the context of Botanicas, or stores that sell charms, herbs, and other materials used by followers of the religion.

Santeria deities, called by the Yoruba name *orisha* (Chapter 9), show the same syncretism as the Haitian *lwa*. The *orisha*, known by their Yoruba names, are associated with particular saints: Ogun is Saint Peter, Obatala is Saint Mercedes, and Shango is Saint Barbara.

Although *Santeria* is the name by which this religion is now most commonly known, the name was originally pejorative, used by the Spanish to note what they saw as an unusual amount of attention being paid to the Catholic saints as opposed to Jesus Christ. The proper name for the religion is *Regla de Ocha*, or Rule of the Orisha, although Santeria is used as well. The religion is also known for being secretive. Relatively little information about beliefs, rituals, and symbols is released to the general public.

One reason for the secrecy is the use of animal sacrifice in ritual, which has led to conflict between practitioners of Santeria and political authorities in the United States. The issue is whether animal sacrifice should be permitted as part of the First Amendment protection of the free exercise of religion or whether it should be banned under statutes preventing cruelty to animals. The matter has not been resolved, but most U.S. police organizations have become more understanding and permissive about this practice, and the courts have generally upheld the right to practice animal sacrifice.

REVITALIZATION MOVEMENTS

Societies that are situated next to each other experience diffusion, the flow of culture traits that are then adjusted to fit into the receiving culture. This is especially true if the two societies are roughly equal in terms of technology and economy. However, the situation often arises, especially in today's world, in which one culture is able to establish economic and political dominance and

superimpose itself on another. The situation can be a direct takeover, as when one society conquers another and maintains economic, political, and military control, or it can be indirect, as when a missionary or an economic enterprise—a shoe factory, for example—shows up in a community. A missionary or factory manager might not have the political power of a conquering state but still represents a more technologically advanced society with things that people learn to want and need.

The flow of events differs in each situation, but generally speaking, a massive introduction of items from a dominant culture can have a dramatic effect on the receiving culture. The end result could be the destruction of a culture. The people might survive, but they end up becoming a mere reflection of the dominant culture, living on the fringes of that culture. Moreover, demoralization manifests itself in many maladaptive behaviors.

One society might be totally assimilated into another, it might simply disappear as an entity, or it might exert itself and become a viable subculture within the larger culture. Frequently, however, there is a reaction that often manifests itself as a religious or secular movement known as a **revitalization movement**. (This is not the only situation in which revitalization movements arise. They can also result from some environmental disaster such as a drought or epidemic.)

A revitalization movement is one that forms in an attempt to deliberately bring about change in a society. The change is perceived as more bearable and satisfactory to those under pressure. The movement may be secular, but they are very frequently religious movements, complete with mythology, ritual, and symbolism, and may result in the formation of a new religion. These are deliberate activities, frequently initiated by an individual or a small group that promises better times and solutions to the problems that besiege the community or are perceived as a threat to the community.

Revitalization movements arise from a number of perceived stressful and often traumatic situations. These situations include political and economic marginalization (loss of effective political participation), economic deprivation and poverty, and malnutrition and high levels of chronic or epidemic diseases. There may also be less tangible stresses within the social structure that arise when a culture is discriminated against by the dominant society and when there is a perception that the values of the community are being threatened.

The Origins of Revitalization Movements

Anthony Wallace describes several stages in the development of a revitalization movement.[1] In the early stages of contact or other stressors, change is occurring, but at an acceptable rate, within relatively normal levels. Over time, the stress levels become intolerable to some people. This phase is characterized by an increase in illness, alcoholism and drug use, and crime. For many individuals, although these behaviors are dysfunctional, they serve as a temporary adjustment to change.

Increasing exposure to the dominant society and the increasing influx of new traits, many of which cannot easily be integrated into the existing culture, increase the amount of stress on the individual. Means of livelihood may be restricted, and new economic patterns may emerge that are not consistent with the ideals of the culture. For example, individualized wage labor may replace family-based economic activities with the effect of tearing the family apart and increasing the isolation of individuals. Alcoholism, drug use, and crime may become endemic as normal social relationships within the society break down. Sometimes the dominant culture deliberately attempts to destroy the indigenous religious pattern (often by ridicule and destruction of sacred objects and sacred spaces), and attempts may be made to substitute the religious practices of the dominant culture for those of the subordinate one. However, not all such movements are religious. They can be political, such as many of the elements of the Celtic revival in Ireland or the Communist movements in many countries.

resonated with the population, and much of the interest in the newly introduced Christianity was an interest in discovering the ritual secrets that the missionaries used to bring the *cargo* from over the sea from the Land of the Dead.

Soon it became clear to the local peoples that the key to controlling the *cargo* was not to be discovered through Christian rituals because the missionaries refused to share the magical secrets with them. Other negative factors included the Europeans' unwillingness to share many of their goods with the natives, the condescending way the Europeans treated the natives, and the appearance and behavior of the Europeans.

This disillusionment led to the emergence of a number of stories that explained what the local people were experiencing. The main puzzles were the origin and control of the *cargo* and the power of the outsiders. The Europeans did no obvious work and engaged in a number of very strange activities. The manufactured goods must have been made in the Land of the Dead by the ancestors of the Melanesians. The Europeans, through ritual, intercepted the airplanes and stole

NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

New religious movements have generally branched off of older, more established religions and thus have many features in common with the older, mainstream religion. If the new group is still considered mainstream and differs on just a few points from the mainstream religion, it is referred to as a **denomination**. Examples of Christian denominations are Baptist and Lutheran; Islamic denominations would include Sunni and Shi'a. A sect is even more different from the older religion than a denomination is. Although still connected to the mainstream religion, sects are generally associated with a founder or leader and new revelations. Examples of Christian sects include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, discussed earlier. There are real challenges with the term **cult**. This word has several different meanings, and it is used in different ways by different people.

The "Cult" Question

Historically, a cult is a particular form or system of religious worship. This includes specific devotion to a particular person or thing. Thus the Catholic Church speaks of the cult of Mary. However, very few people use the term *cult* with this meaning. Although there are some neutral definitions—such as considering a cult to be a small, recently created, and spiritually innovative group—most definitions are associated with more negative imagery.

Even those who use the term *cult* with negative meanings do not agree on what a cult is. For example, evangelical Christian groups, such as the Counter-Cult Movement, label as a cult any religious group that accepts some, but not all, of what evangelicals accept as Christian doctrines. Thus, the LDS church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Unification Church (discussed later) are all considered to be cults. However, a group such as the Wiccans does not get attention from this group because they are not a Christian-derived religion. This highlights the gate-keeping issue that often presents itself when a new group splinters off. Who gets to decide who can call themselves Christian? Some fundamentalist Christian groups carry this even farther and define any religion that deviates from their beliefs—be it Judaism, Buddhism, or a UFO religion—to be a cult.

On the other side is the Anti-Cult Movement. Largely composed of mental health professionals, this group targets what they consider to be dangerous and authoritarian mind control ("brainwashing") and doomsday cults. They are most concerned with what they see as deceptive recruitment techniques and psychological techniques used to control members. The media also play a large part in how religious groups are perceived. When the term *cult* is employed by the media, it is most often used to refer to a small religious group with a charismatic leader who is brainwashing his followers and is in total control of them. The group is seen as evil and usually as believing that the end of the world is imminent.

Because of this confusion and the often negative connotations of the term, many researchers avoid the term *cult* altogether and instead prefer the term ***new religious movement***. However, this debate points to another area of disagreement about how [illegible] extreme new religious movements are perceived. [illegible]

that we will avoid in this book. Instead, we will focus on the perspective that high demand religious groups are just one end of the continuum of religious expression while acknowledging the challenges and dilemmas these groups present for the larger society.

Characteristics of High Demand Religions

All religious groups require their members to believe certain things and to behave in certain ways. All groups require some degree of conformity from their members. However, groups do vary in the level of this demand and the degree of control they attempt to exert over members. Here we will examine groups that are at the high end of this continuum.

An example of a higher-end demand situation that very few would label a cult is a Roman Catholic monastery. Monks must follow a strict schedule of sleep, work, and prayer. Their diet is limited, and they often take oaths of celibacy and even silence. They must accept without question the decisions of those in authority. These are traits that are commonly associated with high demand groups.

In high demand groups the beliefs and behaviors of group members are strictly controlled. Common methods used to control beliefs include long hours of work with little or no free time, a restricted sleep schedule, strict control of access to outside information, and creation of a view of the outside world as unsafe and threatening. Behavior also may be controlled by public shaming and humiliation and isolation from outside contacts. Communal living is common, and members may be given new names and identities to signify their break with their past lives and their affiliation with, and devotion to, the new group.

Some researchers claim that the endless repetition of prayers and other techniques are in actuality autohypnotic techniques. For example, a person might be taught that when faced with criticism of the group, he or she should repeat a certain phrase over and over. Another area of concern for some observers is the deceptive recruitment techniques that some groups use. Of course, some of these techniques are found in groups that are not considered to be high demand, and quite a few of them are used by organizations that are generally not questioned, such as Army boot camps.

MIND CONTROL? One of the major issues surrounding high demand religious groups is whether or not mind control or brainwashing could or does take place. A proposition of the anticult movement is that the pressures exerted by these groups move beyond normal social pressure and constitute a unique form of influence that can be all-controlling. However, many social scientists question this assertion. How is "brainwashing" different from other forms of social influence and normal socialization? Why do we not say that people converting to mainstream groups are being brainwashed? Were we all brainwashed by our parents to accept the beliefs of our cultures and our religions? Are advertising, military training, and schooling all examples of brainwashing?

An interesting study by Jeffrey Pfeifer looks at how we label these different areas of social influence differently. In this study, people were presented with a fictional paragraph describing a student named Bill. They were told that Bill left college either to join a Catholic seminary, to join the Marines, or to join the Moonies. Several high-demand techniques were described:[2]

> While at the facility, Bill is not allowed very much contact with his friends or family and he notices that he is seldom left alone. He also notices that he never seems to be able to talk to the other four people who signed up for the program and that he is continually surrounded by [Moonies, Marines, Priests] who make him feel guilty if he questions any of their actions or beliefs.

When asked to describe Bill's experience, those who thought Bill joined a Catholic seminary labeled it as "resocialization"; those who thought he joined the Marines frequently labeled it as "conversion." Only those subjects who thought that Bill joined the Moonies used the term "brainwashing."

Many studies have failed to support the idea of brainwashing. Several of these have focused on the issue of recruitment, with the idea that if these groups did have some way to override free will and control a person's mind, then everyone, or at least almost everyone, who attends a recruitment meeting for one of these groups should in fact convert. This turns out not to be the case.

Sociologist Eileen Barker studied the Unification Church. She found that only a small percentage of people who attended Unification Church recruitment seminars actually joined the church. Another study by psychiatrist Saul Levine looked at over 800 people who had joined controversial religious movements. He found that more than 80 percent dropped out within two years. These are hardly the statistics one would expect if the groups had mind control over their members.[3]

GENUINELY DANGEROUS RELIGIOUS GROUPS. This is not to say that there are no reli

which they could overcome human weaknesses and prepare themselves for a physical transition to the next kingdom.

The group saw humans in a dualistic way: that the human soul was a superior entity that was only temporarily housed in a physical body. Much of the metaphor was that of gardening. The soul was seen as a plant in a container, but this container could be left behind, and the soul could be replanted in another container. The Heaven's Gate members believed that extraterrestrials had planted the seeds of current human beings millions of years ago and were coming to reap the harvest of this work by taking spiritually evolved individuals to join the ranks of spaceship crews. The members believed that by committing suicide together at the right time, they would leave their containers (or bodies) behind and be replanted into another container at a level above that of human existence.

The correct time was seen as March 1997, near Easter. They believed that a spaceship was hiding in the tail of the Hale-Bopp comet. Twenty-one women and eighteen men voluntarily committed suicide in three groups on three successive days.

RAELIANS. The Raelian Movement was founded in 1973 by French race car driver and journalist Claude Vorilhon, known as Rael to his followers. Vorilhon says that while walking in the mountains around France, he had an encounter with

FUNDAMENTALISM

The last several decades have seen a declining membership in traditional religions in the United States. They have largely been replaced by a growth of membership in new religious traditions, primarily neo-pagan and New Age groups and Christian fundamentalist groups. Although fundamentalist groups in the United States are based in Christianity, other religious traditions—namely, Judaism and Islam—also have important fundamentalist movements.

The term **fundamentalism** originated in the nineteenth century. At that time it was used to refer to the opponents of liberal Protestantism who were urging a return to the "fundamentals" of Christianity. Because of this, many non-Christian groups question the broader usage that the term has acquired today. Again, this is an issue of insider and outsider perspectives. Although some groups object to having the term *fundamentalism* applied to them, from an analytic perspective we can see that these groups do have many features in common and can be referred to by the same term.

Characteristics of Fundamentalist Groups

In many ways fundamentalists groups are easier to define by what they are against than what they are for. These groups protest against, and fear, modernization in general and the secularization of society in specific. The world has changed dramatically in recent times. The Enlightenment, new scientific discoveries, political revolutions such as the American and French Revolutions, and a general increase in commercialization and industrialization have had a large impact on cultures and their worldviews. Society is no longer focused on the big questions of morality and salvation. Change is now prized over continuity. An emphasis on production and commercial efficiency has replaced more traditional values. Loyalty to and identification with the state have replaced loyalty to and identification with one's religious group. Fundamentalists express outrage at these trends.

Although there are many different fundamentalist groups, they have reacted to modernization in some similar ways. Richard Antoun describes fundamentalism "as an orientation to the modern world, both cognitive and emotional, that focuses on protest and change and on certain consuming themes: the quest for purity, the search for authenticity, totalism and activism, the necessity for certainty (scripturalism), selective modernization, and the centering of the mythic past in the present."[5]

Totalism is a reaction to the increasing separation of religion from other domains of life. Fundamentalists believe that religion is relevant to, and should be a part of, all parts of a society. Religious texts play an important role in fundamentalist beliefs. **Scripturalism** refers to the practice of justifying beliefs and actions by reference to the religious text. These texts are generally held to be inerrant and represent certainty and stability in a rapidly changing world. Another aspect of the importance of religious texts is the idea that these texts are relevant to life today, what Antoun calls **traditioning**.

Other important themes of fundamentalist groups include millenarianism and a focus on the perceived struggle between good and evil. These groups also are characterized by activism. Antoun points out that "Fundamentalism is inherently oppositional and minoritarian. It is the protest of those *not* in power."[6] It is important to note that he means political and cultural power, not necessarily economic power.

Although the themes of fundamentalist groups are very similar cross-culturally, individual movements obviously have arisen in response to very different cultural and historical circumstances. The growth of Christian fundamentalism in the United States was a reaction to the secular Protestant ideology that was very important in the early days of the country. A belief in

Eastern terrorists are probably fundamentalist Muslims, most fundamentalist Muslims are not terrorists. Terrorists represent an extremist, radical wing of fundamentalist Is-

can you make the argument that Christianity and Islam began as revitalization movements?

5. Why do high demand religions develop? Why do people join these religions?
6. Some anthropologists have argued that it would have been better if the government had dealt with the Branch Davidians at Waco, Texas, as a religious group and had taken their beliefs seriously. How could this have been accomplished? Do you think that the destruction at Waco could have been avoided? Why or why not?

Endnotes

1. A. F. C. Wallace, *Culture and Personality* (New York: Random House, 1970).
2. Quoted in J. R. Lewis, "Overview," in J. R. Lewis (Ed.), *Odd Gods: New Religions and the Cult Controversy* (Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 2001), p. 41.
3. Ibid., pp. 32–33.
4. H. Witt, "Faith and Culture: Branch Davidian: Waco Sect Survives," *Chicago Tribune* (June 14, 2004).
5. R. T. Antoun, *Understanding Fundamentalism: Christian, Islamic and Jewish Movements* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2001), p. 2.
6. Ibid., p. 13, italics in original.

cleromancy Divination by the casting of lots such as the rolling of a die or the drawing of straws.

clitoridectomy A surgical procedure characterized by removal of the clitoris as well as parts or all of the labia minora.

cognition The processes of the human brain, including perception, attention, learning, memory, concept formation, and problem solving.

collective conscious A set of beliefs shared by members of a social group that functions to limit the natural selfishness of individuals and promote social cooperation.

collective unconscious Inborn elements of the

culture area A geographical area in which societies share many cultural traits.

cursing ritual An antitherapy ritual that involves reciting a curse to bring about illness and death.

deliberate divination Divination that someone sets out to do.

demon A spirit being, usually evil.

denomination A religious group that differs on just a few points from the mainstream religion.

diaspora Movement of a population out of their homeland.

di

ethnocentrism Using one's own culture as the basis for interpreting and judging other cultures.

ethnographer A person who produces an ethnography.

ethnographic present Speaking or writing about cultures in the present tense although what is described might no longer exist.

graphology Divination through handwriting analysis.

haruspication Divination by the examination of entrails of sacrificed animals.

healer A religious specialist who concentrates on healing.

hedonism Pursuit of or devotion to pleasure as a matter of principle.

increase rite A type of ritual whose purpose is to aid the survival and reproduction of a totemic plant or animal.

incubi Male demons who have sex with human women while they sleep, resulting in the birth of demons, witches, and deformed children.

infibulation Form of female genital cutting including excision of the clitoris, labia minora, and most of the labia majora.

Inquisition A unit of the Roman Catholic Church that convened to judge cases of heresy.

inspirational divination A type of divination that involves a spiritual experience, such as a direct contact with a supernatural being through an altered state of consciousness

interpretive approach Idea that cultural systems are understood by studying meaning; religion is a cluster of symbols that provides a charter for a culture's ideas, values, and way of life.

invention Coming up with a solution to a problem using the technology at hand.

jinn In the Islamic religion, a spirit being created of fire.

karma The effect of a person's behavior during the series of phases of the person's existence. Karma is seen as determining the person's destiny.

kiva A ceremonial chamber, often built underground, that is found among Native American societies in the American Southwest.

Law of Contagion Things that were once in contact continue to be in contact after the physical connection is severed.

Law of Similarity Things that are alike are the same.

Law of Sympathy Magic that depends on the apparent association or agreement between things.

legend A traditional story about past events that is considered to be true; usually contains an element of reality—a known character, event, or place.

liminality The state of ambiguous marginality that characterizes the transition phase of a rite of passage.

linguistic anthropology The anthropological study of language.

magic Ways in which a person can compel the supernatural to behave in certain ways.

mana An impersonal supernatural force.

Marxist approach Idea that religion is a construction of those in power, designed to divert people's attention from the miseries of their lives; a way of getting people to go along with capitalist culture.

medium A practitioner who intentionally communicates with the supernatural to find information.

membranophone A musical instrument that incorporates a taut membrane or skin such as a drum.

menarche A young woman's first menstruation.

messianic movement A type of revitalization movement that is based on the appearance of a divine savior in human form who will bring about the solution to the problems that exist within the society.

millenarian movements A type of revitalization movement that envisions a change through an apocalyptic transformation.

modernity A philosophical movement based on ideas of rationality, objectivity, reason, and science as the means of gaining knowledge, truth, and progress.

monomyth A theme common to many myths that tells of the adventures of a culture hero.

monotheism A belief in one god.

mummification A technique of preserving a dead body involving drying and preservatives.

mystery religion A religion whose beliefs, practices, and true nature are known only to those who have been initiated into the religion.

myth A sacred story that provides the basis for religious beliefs and practices.

nativistic movement A type of revitalization movement that develops in traditional societies that are threatened by the activities of more technologically advanced societies.

natural divination Inspirational divination.

necromancy Divination through contact with ancestors or the dead.

neo-paganism A revival of pre-Christian religious practice.

neoshamanism A modern spiritual practice that draws on some concepts and practices of traditional shamanism, but is usually used as a method for improving an individual's life.

new religious movement A historically recent religious movement, often involving new leaders and new scriptures or new interpretations of older religious traditions.

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